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# The Restoration Love Ethos and the Representation of Love in the Plays of William Wycherley

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THE RESTORATION LOVE ETHOS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF LOVE IN  
THE PLAYS OF WILLIAM WYCHERLEY

by

Dominic F. Martia

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## PREFACE

Having read and taught poetry of the Restoration and eighteenth century for some time, I had long ceased believing that literature was a spontaneous outflow of song originating somewhere within the poet's soul. More probably, literature was an artfully designed response to a specific set of stimuli which themselves had been determined by a particular cultural and literary environment. What was true of literature generally would be, I presumed, at least as true of the drama. My first reading of The Country Wife persuaded me that here was a play wholly in accord with these convictions: Wycherley was definitely speaking to and for the courtly group with which he associated.

But this dissertation is not an attempt to convert that persuasion into an argument, for further reading of Wycherley, of other dramatists of the period, and of modern criticism, has led me to somewhat modify my original ideas. Basically, what I now believe is that while Wycherley addresses his plays to the court society that patronizes the theatre, he does so mainly with an intention of asserting a point of view which is his own and which does not necessarily correspond to the assumptions and values of his social group. Especially in The Country Wife and The Plain Dealer does this prove to be the case.

I recognize that this belief is neither very original nor very profound. It is even possible that what occurred to me only after some reading and reflection would seem immediately obvious to others. Sensing this possibility, I have no intention of attempting to convince others

that they ought to believe as I do. My belief about Wycherley is not the burden of an argument; it is a perspective. From this perspective I intend to focus on a limited but crucial aspect of Wycherley's plays, his treatment of love. My ultimate purpose is to indicate where Wycherley's treatment of love conforms to and where it deviates from the complex of assumptions I have labelled "The Restoration love ethos." As for this phrase, I realize it is not immune from the obvious defects of labels. I hope my reader will accept it as a convenient means of referring to the social and moral phenomena I attempt to illustrate in my first chapter.

I believe my approach is original. No other student of Wycherley has attempted to discern by close analysis of the plays themselves the relationship of Wycherley to the Restoration love ethos. Indeed only a conviction that the plays themselves will yield answers unavailable in other sources would justify my extended treatment of Love in a Wood and my attention to The Gentleman Dancing Master. The reader will observe that an important function of my analyses of these plays is to prepare for the analyses of the more important plays. Thus, for example, having analyzed Love in a Wood at some length in Chapter III, I am able to conclude with some confidence in Chapter V, that in The Country Wife Wycherley does not introduce any unfamiliar types of love as part of his subject. I believe that my approach is not so obscure as to require further prefatory explanation, and I hope that where my conclusions are not incontrovertible they can at least stimulate counter-arguments. For nothing would deprecate my efforts as much as indifference.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE RESTORATION LOVE ETHOS

Love is a vast subject, the Restoration a complex period and England, even during those days of small cities and idyllic countryside, a varied society. Obviously, then, it cannot be love in all its aspects during the Restoration that will be considered here, but only what can be denoted by the phrase Restoration love ethos.<sup>1</sup> This phrase shall apply to the conventions and practices which dictate the modes by which amorous relations occurred and by which they were judged among the gallants and ladies in the court of Charles II and in those levels of society on which the influence of Charles's court radiated. It is from this rather narrow spectrum of English society that William Wycherley drew his characters, between whom and the court circle numerous correspondences presumably would have existed. Having himself spent most of his creative life within this spectrum of society, Wycherley's ideas of love must have been influenced by the ideas which nourish the Restoration love ethos. But kings, courtiers and dramatists are not the whole of reality, and we must remember that, notwithstanding the inevitable association of love-making with the court life of the Restoration, the glitter and excitement at Whitehall was not all there was to love in England during the period. Nor should the love modes of the

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<sup>1</sup>I am using the definition of "ethos" found in the OED: "The characteristic spirit, prevalent tone of sentiment, of a people or community." III, 314.

court be considered typical or representative of the period. They occupy the forefront of many interpretations of the Restoration period because of the success of the wits and poets of the time at extolling them. Men such as Rochester and Sedley fill their writings with gamey but essentially accurate references to the sex life of the court. But less lively "humble annals," not nearly as widely read as the work of the court poets, give a somewhat different picture. Referring to this other picture the historian, Arthur Bryant, reminds us that "the family had remained as it was through all the troubled times. It remained so, too, after the Restoration when textbook historians would have us suppose that because there was license at Whitehall the whole moral life of the nation was poisoned."<sup>2</sup> Compared to the intrigues of aristocratic lovers, the love modes of ordinary folk, because they so predictably inclined toward monogamy and domesticity, held scant interest for the court poets and dramatists except as the subject of ridicule; hence they did not receive the attention necessary to insure posterity's appreciation of them. Moreover, the tendency of the poets and dramatists is to offer their particular experiences and values as though they are universally applicable, except to the mad or the inadequate. We find, in a rather typical line, Hippolita, in Wycherley's The Gentleman Dancing Master, quipping to the staid Caution "'tis a pleasant, well-bred-complacent-free-frolic-good-natured-pretty age,"<sup>3</sup> as though all the adjectives assuredly apply not merely to her own circle of companions but to the entire nation. Obviously, such could not have been the case. Love, then, in the present study refers to the amorous behavior among those

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<sup>2</sup>The England of Charles II (London, 1935), p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>The Works of William Wycherley, 4 vols., ed. Montague Summers (London, 1924), I, 163.

people who participate in the court life and those people who imitate them, the men and women who inhabit the parks and playhouses, boudoirs and drawing rooms that comprise the mise-en-scenes of the Restoration comedies, specifically those of William Wycherley.

Just as today it would be difficult to understand the nature of love, sex and marriage without some knowledge of their theory and practice in preceding generations, so it would be difficult to understand the love modes of the Restoration court by merely observing the behavior of its gallants and ladies, which in itself reveals nothing of the genesis or meaning of these modes. The "playboy philosophy," "the sexual revolution," "women's liberation" are confusing, even mystifying, phenomena to the observer ignorant of the concepts of "puritanism," "victorianism," and "middle-class morality." This is not to say that these rejected concepts refer to actualities that really caused the current phenomena. But the history of these current phenomena is as much the history of what people have desired to believe about the past as it is the record of what the past really consisted of and the stages by which it has actually evolved into the present. The libertinism that characterizes the image of the court of Charles II and to some degree the reality resembles the phenomena mentioned in one important respect: it began as a reaction to a felt repression. But like its modern counterparts, it became more than indiscriminate indulgence in previously denied pleasures. It became a more or less self-conscious style of life with its own code and its own standards; in an informal but nonetheless decisive sense it came to include two philosophical components one of which consisted of a rejection of a love ideology inherited from the previous generation, another of which consisted of a stimulus to live according to the implications of

certain contemporary thinking. Thus what may have begun as a spontaneous expression of rekindled sensuality following the Puritan repression, within a short period of time became a more or less conscious value system. What were the philosophical components of the libertinism of Charles's court which seem most relevant to an understanding of Wycherley's love themes, whose analysis is the ultimate purpose of this study? The first is anti-Platonism; the second, a compound of Hobbesianism, the new science and skepticism. In addition the example set by the king himself must be considered, for it furnishes the sanction and some of the style for the libertinism.<sup>4</sup>

Anti-Platonism in the Restoration is not one movement but several. It occurs in philosophy, in religion and, ultimately, in literature. In philosophy it stems from the efforts particularly by Hobbes, whose direct influence on the Restoration love ethos will be considered later, to establish a material basis for all reality. According to Basil Willey, Hobbes desired to sweep away the Cartesian distinction between soul and body. Hobbes did not "feel the need to postulate a separate body entity or 'soul' in order to account for the phenomena of consciousness. He felt quite sure that he knew what was real, namely, the abstract geometrical world of matter in motion, and that this world extended without a break into ourselves."<sup>5</sup> In religion Anti-Platonism manifests itself in a rising tide

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<sup>4</sup>This selection and categorization may seem arbitrary to readers aware of the rich, deep soil of classical literature beneath the literary works of the seventeenth century. For my purposes it will be necessary to exclude the classical influences. Their origins are too remote and their transmutations too involved to make them subject to the kind of study I am proposing.

<sup>5</sup>The Seventeenth Century Background, (Garden City, N.Y.), p. 108

of deism, again originating from Hobbes, which the labors of the Cambridge Platonists were barely sufficient to hold back.<sup>6</sup> In literature, which is our chief concern, Anti-Platonism consisted of the application of certain logical consequences of materialism to the writing of poetry. Platonism itself, as it occurred in literature was not a simple transference of some of Plato's ideas into poetic images. The ideas of Plato first went through a phase of Neo-Platonism, which, blended with some pure Platonism, became "Marsilianism" through the translations and commentaries of Marsilio Ficino in fifteenth century Florence. It was this Florentine blend that was the stuff out of which English Renaissance Platonism grew.<sup>7</sup> The features of this syncretic philosophy as they have become manifest in poetry can be exposed by means of the study of particular poems, but first it will be useful to indicate the meaning of such a philosophy in the minds of the poets.

It is not easy to formulate the Platonism of the Renaissance into a solid, unified whole. Nor is it possible to generalize that Platonism characterized the lyric poetry of the period called the Renaissance. Even the "standard" education of young poets in accordance with the concept of

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<sup>6</sup>In his chapter "The Cambridge Platonists," from The Seventeenth Century Background, Basil Willey offers a useful key to understanding the unity of their methods and purposes. However, he does not indicate the profound threat to the Platonists, to Cartesian idealism and to all religion posed by Hobbes. In citing the efforts of Platonist thinkers to repel Hobbesianism, a historian of philosophy writes: "But their Platonism might have taken no organized aggressive form nor been known outside the lecture rooms had it not been for the challenge to the whole basis on which both Christianity and Platonism stood, that came from the new thought on the nature of the physical world, as interpreted by such writers as Gassendi, and the application of it to the origin of law and morality by Hobbes." John Muirhead, The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy (London, 1931), pp. 27-28.

<sup>7</sup>This summary of Platonism is based on chapters II and II of John Vyvyan's Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty (London, 1961).

"Imitation" was carried on with a "wide range of theories of poetic" and was "conceived to be as free as that copying of monuments of the soul's own magnificence which William Butler Yeats had in mind."<sup>8</sup> Hence it would seem that the mark of early seventeenth century poems was their individuality. In this situation it becomes pointless to insist on a central, unifying theme governing all the lyric poetry of the period, just as pointless, incidentally, for the drama. Yet it is not impossible to suggest a set of ideas found in the works of the major poets of the time, a set which comprises the theme capable of being labelled Platonic without committing violence upon logic. It is this theme per se and not necessarily the reputation or practice of the Renaissance poets that provoked a response from the Restoration court poets. This response became the force behind a new conception of love which influenced the tone of court life and which found its fullest expression in the comic drama. A very concise summary of the genesis and development of the Renaissance Platonism I have been discussing is contained in E. M. W. Tillyards The Elizabethan World Picture. In analyzing the Renaissance popularizations of Plato, Tillyard writes:

One of the chief of these was the discourse of Bembo on love in the last book of Castiglione's Courtier, widely known through Hoby's translation in 1566. This renewed Platonizing created an enthusiastic idealism which is a true mark of the Renaissance. It is a habit of mind most difficult for a modern to grasp, being at once fantastic and closely allied to action. It was something that impelled Sydney to seek education through his love for Stella, and honour in sordid battles in the low countries; that turned Queen Elizabeth into Belpheobe without the least blunting men's knowledge that she was a difficult and tyrannical old woman. In the same way it fosters a high and fantastical conception of the universe among men who lived in an England whose standards of hygiene, decency and humanitarianism would make moderns sick.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ruth Wallerstein, Studies in Seventeenth Century Poetic (Madison, Wisc, 1950), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup>(New York, 1901), p. 45.



In other words, transcending the sensuous world of experience was an abstract, intellectualized world existing only in the realm of the ideal. In the area of love and the relations between the sexes, this transcendent ideal world is made manifest through a conception of the loved one not as an object offering possibilities of physical gratification but as an image of the supra mundane reality, an image that serves to guide and direct the lover towards the ideal perfection. Physical beauty has its place within this conception of the function of the loved one. Physical beauty reminds the lover of the beauty of virtue which he seeks and it keeps him in pursuit of the ideal life beyond the life of passions and appetites. The Platonic philosophy of love and the mortal lover's inability to live up to its demands are the subject of Sonnet 5 of Sydney's Astrophil and Stella:

It is most true, that eyes are form'd to serve  
 The inward light: and that the heavenly part  
 Ought to be kind, from whose rules who do swerve,  
 Rebels to Nature, strive for their own smart.  
 It is most true, what we call Cupid's dart,  
 An image is, which for ourselves we carve;  
 And fooles, adore in temple of our hart.  
 Till that good God make church and Churchmen starve.  
 True that true Beautie Vertue is indeed,  
 Whereof this Beautie can be but a shade,  
 Which elements with mortal mixture breed:  
 True that on earth we are but pilgrims made,  
 And should in soule up to our country move:  
 True, and yet true that I must Stella love.<sup>10</sup>

In the first quatrain, Astrophil, Sydney's persona, affirms the distinction between the sensuous and the ideal worlds. The "inward light" and "the heavenly part" reflect the ideal. These, and not the visible world, should attract the sight. Nature requires this preference and punishes those who reject it. This Nature is obviously not physical nature, the perceivable universe and its phenomena. It is the cosmic principle behind the individual's

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<sup>10</sup>The Poems of Sir Philip Sydney, ed. William Ringler (Oxford, 1962), p.167.

desire to achieve transcendence. The second quatrain seems to warn against idolizing physical attraction, "Cupid's dart," for its own sake. Love, after all, is an "image," of no value in itself. The poet is saying that those who worship love instead of what it signifies and what it leads to are "fooles." The third quatrain presents the quintessential tenet of the Platonic philosophy of love, which Astrophil acknowledges is the fitting object of his desire. "This Beautie," that is physical beauty, which inspires love at the sexual level is "but a shade." True beauty is an ideal entity existing above the realm of physicality. The poet identifies it with "Vertue." The poem implicitly argues that once stimulated by the beauty of the loved one's body and face, the lover will pursue the ideal beauty and thereby ultimately achieve virtue. Sydney characterizes this pursuit with a Christian image: "we are but pilgrims made," reinforcing the idea of love's sacredness and spirituality and warning against the earthly distraction of carnality. The phrase "up to our country," in line thirteen, captures the idea that this pursuit of virtue will entail an ascent; one graduates into a higher sphere of existence, providing one does not allow himself to become distracted by mere physical love. Astrophil, however, cannot divorce himself from physical love. He "must Stella love," that is he persists in loving the real woman and not the ideal toward which she directs him. An interesting facet of this poem is that while in the end the persona is forced to admit his inability to conquer the overwhelming power of physical love, he never suggests that the ideal love of which he is incapable is a mere myth or a lie. The inadequacy lies in him and not in the Platonic ideal. He makes no effort to rationalize his inadequacy by confuting the principle of the existence of ideal love. Thus, in the poem, persistent passion and unsublimated

carnality are regarded as aberrations, as failures to remain on the true path to virtue. This attitude, as much perhaps as the particular philosophical assumptions in the poem reflect a significant feature of the Renaissance love ethos not to be found in the love ethos of the Restoration.

In Spenser's Amoretti, a sonnet cycle composed several years after Astrophil and Stella,<sup>11</sup> we find Renaissance Platonism carried in several sonnets to the point of rhapsodic chastity and ecstatic self-denial. Spenser, like Sydney, seems too full-bodied a poet to totally deny that carnality and lust exist, but his repression of them is joyous rather than rueful. Not grudgingly but happily he conforms to the Platonic rigor. Sonnet 58 reveals this phenomenon, as well as other important features of Spenser's Platonism:

Let not one sparke of filthy lustfull fyre  
 ne one light glance of sensuall desyre  
 Attempt to work her gentle mind's unrest.  
 But pure affections bred in spotelsse brest,  
 and modest thoughts breath'd from well tempered sprites,  
 Goe visit her in her chast bowre of rest,  
 accompanye with angelick delightes,  
 There fill your selfe with the most joyous sights,  
 the which my selfe could never yet attayne:  
 but speake no word to her of these sad plights,  
 which her too constant stiffnesse doth constrainne.  
 Onely behold her rare perfection,  
 and blesse your fortunes fayre election.<sup>12</sup>

This sonnet admirably illustrates some of the secondary requirements and principles of Platonism which complement those primary qualities discernible in the Sydney sonnet. Not only is physical love seen as destructive and

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<sup>11</sup>See The Works of Edmund Spenser, A Variorum Edition, ed. Charles G. Osgood and Henry G. Lotspeich (Baltimore, 1947) II, 631-38 for the dating of the Amoretti.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

repugnant--"filthy lustful fyre"--it is irreconcilably opposed to the "angelick delightes" of spiritual love. Lust is identified as the active component of the love relation and is presumed to be male. Spirituality is passive; it exists in the "chast Bowre of rest." It is female. In such a system, a lustful man is an intemperate fool; a lustful woman would be a monstrosity.

In Sonnet 58, the woman is not only passive and chaste, she is a paragon of all virtue, and the poet despairs of ever reaching the heights of virtue and goodness that she occupies. She has a "rare perfection," which she suffers him to behold. This sufferance is his "fortune's fayre election." Notwithstanding his moral inferiority to her, his grossness and unworthiness contrasted to her ethereality and sanctity, he may gain entry into the sacred bowre, providing he first purges himself of "sensuall desyre" until only "pure affections" and "modest thoughts" inhabit his breast. Love, then, consists of the man's efforts to refine his spirit, to cast off its grossness so that it will become worthy of receiving the vision of perfection which is the woman, not in her everyday role but ensconced in a "chaste bowre," transfigured, as she might appear to an inner eye capable of idealizing her outward form into a vision of immobile, hence immutable perfection. There are many parallels between this sonnet by Spenser and Sonnet 5 from Astrophil and Stella, as indeed one would expect. More importantly, though, the poems illustrate two essential components of the Platonism I am attempting to describe. The first of these, which is the central subject of Sydney's sonnet, is the idea of transcendent love. The second of these, more prominent in the Spenser sonnet, is the idea of the preeminence of feminine virtue. Many corollaries adhere to both ideas: The notion of spiritual ascent, the need for

purgation, the opposition of active and passive tempers, correlative to the opposition of lust and chastity which in turn characterize the basic opposition of male and female, which can only be resolved by their complementariness at the ideal level. These ideas may not exhaust the concept of Platonic love, but for our purposes they are sufficient. These are the ideas that were either turned inside out or discarded by the love ethos of the Restoration.

Before turning to some samples of Restoration poetry that will indicate the movement against Platonism, it is necessary for a moment to contemplate the situation between the time of the great Renaissance poets, such as Sydney and Spenser, and the Restoration. Probably the best way to describe this intervening period would be to say that between the time of Shakespeare's death and the Puritan Revolution Platonism continuously lost ground before the attacks on idealism from Cartesianism and Hobbesianism.<sup>13</sup> This loss was felt in poetry although it did not encourage the conscious creation of a counter value. For example, Waller's poem "On a Girdle," published in 1645, retains vestiges of Platonism which it exhibits in a romantic rather than a spiritual light:

That which her slender waist confin'd  
Shall now my joyfull temples bind;  
No monarch but would give his crowne  
His armes might doe what this has done.

It is my Heavens extremest Sphere.  
The pale which held the lovely Deare,  
My joy, my griefe, my hope, my love,  
Doe all within this circle move.

A narrow compass, and yet there  
Dwells all that's good, and all that's faire:

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<sup>13</sup>See Muirhead, p. 28. Also see Willey, chaps. V and VI.

Give me but what this Ribbon ty'd,  
Take all the sun goes round beside.<sup>14</sup>

This poem contains the conception of the woman as a rare being. It contains the implication that the man is unworthy of her. These are vestigial Platonic elements. But the nobility of this particular woman is obviously not of a spiritual kind. The images of spirituality, "Heavens extremist Sphere," for example, recall Platonic imagery, but the referent of Waller's imagery is not the transcendent condition beyond physical love. The referent is physical love itself. Waller is not extolling Platonism, nor is he rejecting it. Rather he seems to be using some of its imagery, perhaps unconsciously, to represent a somewhat hackneyed romantic conception of love. Between the time of Waller's poem and the Restoration, the Puritans reigned, and while it is too much to say that poetry perished as a result of their cold repression,<sup>15</sup> their regime was not the time to permit movement toward the anti-idealistic sensualism of the Restoration love poetry. Thus, for the most part, we must consider the love themes expressed by the Restoration poets as true innovations which begin from a rejection of Platonism so thorough as to promote an inversion of its values. Perhaps poets such as Waller did faintly adumbrate these new values, but it remained the mission of Rochester, Sedley and their contemporaries to thrust them unabashedly on the scene.

The love poetry of the Restoration differs considerably from the samples thus far discussed. Especially different is the poetry of Rochester and Sedley, the two leading court wits. These two inspired much of the love

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<sup>14</sup>Grierson, H. J. C and Bullough, G. The Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse (Oxford, 1951), p. 439.

<sup>15</sup>See Herbert Grierson, Cross Currents in Seventeenth Century English Literature (New York, 1958), chap. V, pp. 97-129 for an account of the fortunes of love poetry during the Puritan period.

ethos of the period, and Wycherley's literary and social connections with them can be demonstrated, and will be touched on in the next chapter. Most important and most famous of the whole group of court wits was John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Born to a royalist family in 1647, Rochester found himself a student at Oxford at the moment of Charles's triumphant return to England.<sup>16</sup> At Oxford several of Rochester's precocities were being nurtured in the taverns by a "rather disreputable don, Dr. Robert Whitehall . . . , who used to lend him a Master's gown to protect him from the Proctors in his nocturnal rambles."<sup>17</sup> Rochester wrote two poems in the pastoral mode in which Strephon, a passionate shepherd, engages in dialogue with Daphne, his love. Through the dramatic situation and the specific meanings and implications of the dialogue, Rochester establishes his anti-Platonism in these poems. Similar anti-Platonic sentiments occur in virtually all of Rochester's love poems, though in other love poems the persona of the poet is not necessarily a pastoral character. In what is probably the earlier of these pastoral poems, written during or prior to 1674,<sup>18</sup> Strephon urges Daphne to release him from his vows of devotion:

Prithee now, fond Fool, give o're  
 Since my heart is gone before,  
 To what purpose shou'd I stay?  
 Love commands another way.<sup>19</sup>

When love has left, so Strephon's argument runs, it is time for the lover to

<sup>16</sup>Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto (London, 1953), pp. XVI-XVII.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. XVII.

<sup>18</sup>Rochester's editors de Sola Pinto and D. M. Vieth date the poem 1691, the date of publication of Poems on Several Occasions. However, Vieth's scholarship dictates placement of the poem in the period 1665-1671. See David M. Vieth, The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (New Haven, 1968), pp. XXXVI ff.

<sup>19</sup>Vieth, pp. 7-9. All quotations from this poem are from this source.

go. In her reply, Daphne pleads to Strephon to dissemble love, to employ "that Art/which first betrayed, to ease my heart." But Strephon will have no part of a humane dishonesty and remains adamant. Without passion in the heart, words mean nothing:

What advantage will it prove,  
If I lye, who cannot love?

Daphne responds with a seemingly innocent question:

Tell me then the reason why,  
Love from hearts in love does flye?

In replying to Daphne's question, Strephon recalls the mythological representation of love, which he, quite logically, endows with attributes and qualities of character appropriate to it:

Love, like other little boys,  
Cries for hearts, as they for toys  
Which when gained in childish play,  
Wantonly are thrown away.

Love is passionate, impetuous; it "cries." It is irresponsible, discarding hearts as a wanton boy would discard his obsolete playthings. It is destructive rather than creative; selfish rather than sacrificing; wayward rather than stable. Daphne's response to Strephon's interpretation of love is to inveigh against the unreliability and unreasonableness of love which, she charges, "does nothing by degrees." To this Strephon offers in reply what are at once the most philosophical, the most erotic and the most revealing lines in the poem:

Nymph, unjustly you inveigh;  
Love, like us, must Fate obey.  
Since 'tis Nature's Law to change,  
Constancy alone is strange.  
See the Heav'ns in lightnings break.  
Next in storms of thunder speak;  
'Till a kind rain from above  
Makes a calm,--'tis so in love.  
Flames begin our first address,  
Like meeting Thunder we embrace;



Then you know the Show'rs that fall  
 Quench the fire and quiet all.

This passage is a brilliantly executed statement of Rochester's anti-Platonism. The images of lightning, thunder and rain form the correspondences in the macrocosm to the experience of love in the microcosm. So far we are among familiar Renaissance usages. The phrases "first address," "we embrace," and the tactful "then you know," apply these images of meteorological phenomena to sexual intimacy. The "Show'rs" in the penultimate line take on definite sexual connotations from its context. In the final line the showers quench the fire of sexual desire and "quiet all," that is literally extinguish any further desire. Thus with the climax of the sex act and the achievement of physical satisfaction, here metaphorised as the stages of a storm, love ends. It does not survive its own fulfillment. Like the wanton boy, once it has had its pleasure, it discards the means of pleasure. Through Strephon's speech, Rochester is denying the Platonic tenet which has it that love exists in the supra-physical sphere. Rochester refuses to even consider the possibility of love outside the physical world where it is governed by the pleasure principle rather than by ideals. For Rochester, love cannot lead to creative perfection. It simply exhausts itself in its own gratification. But Rochester goes further than merely denying the Platonic tenet. He posits a system of the universe totally contradictory to the Platonic system. In this system love is merely the servant of Fate, which is comparable perhaps to its position in the Platonic system. However, in Rochester's system, Fate is itself the instrument of "Nature's Law." And Nature's law dictates the continuous casting off of the old and seeking of the new. "'Tis Nature's Law to change," and "Constancy alone is strange." The Faithless lover does not contradict the system of nature.

In his very faithlessness, he upholds it. Mutability reigns and love is no more immune from its dictates than is the weather.

Considered as a debate, "The Dialogue Between Strephon and Daphne" reaches a stage, in the lines just discussed, at which one of the speakers has completed the presentation of a thesis. From this point, Rochester could have done what is often done in "debate" type poems. Either he could have permitted Daphne to argue a counter-thesis, or he could have arranged his incidents in such a way as to expose a fallacy in Strephon's reasoning or an aspect of his character ironically inconsistent with his argument. Rochester does not take these courses. Instead, he permits Daphne's reply to confirm Strephon's thesis, thereby suggesting clearly that the system of Strephon is the system accepted by the poet himself. In her reply to Strephon's argument that "Constancy alone is strange," Daphne decries her fate and demands to know "what Nymph it is/Robs my breast." Strephon denies any other interest. He must depart purely and simply because constancy is odious:

Many charms my heart enthrall  
But there's one above 'em all:  
With aversion she does flye  
Tedious, trading constancy.

Daphne is convinced by the force of Strephon's logic. She concedes that "change is Fate, and not Design." But believing that Strephon is still only pressing his desires on her, she submits: "Cruel shepherd; I submit." Strephon, however, is a true philosopher and remains faithful to his truth:

Nymph I cannot: 'tis too true,  
Change has greater charms than you.  
Be, by my example, wise,  
Faith to pleasure sacrifice.

Strephon, in rather typical male fashion, presumes to lead Daphne up the path to enlightenment as he, presumably, has previously led her down the path

to sexual pleasure. But Daphne turns the tables on him and confirms his thesis on the basis of her own experience.

Silly Swain, I'll have you know  
 'Twas my practice long ago:  
 Whilst you vainly thought me true.  
 I was false in scorn of you.  
 By my tears, my hearts Disguise.  
 I thy love and thee despise,  
 Womankind more joy discovers  
 Making fools than keeping lovers.

Several important points need to be made about this concluding stanza. First, it confirms the philosophy of Strephon by bringing it down to the level of human behavior, and, significantly, not the behavior of the impassioned shepherd but of the young woman. Second, it perverts the Platonic idea that on the ideal level lovers become partners in virtue, that men and women complement each other, neither sex being dominant. It removes this idea from the sphere of abstract ideals, where the Platonist would put it, and lowers it to the sphere of physical reality. What for the Platonic poets was the source of mutual respect between the sexes becomes for Rochester the justification for equality in sexual behavior. Third, Daphne, in keeping with the whole philosophy of mutability assumes that dissimulation is a natural, inevitable ingredient in love. She scorns Strephon's love by means of her "heart's Disguise." All in all, Daphne's answer provides the experiential support to the philosophy of mutability and, at the same time, in drawing this support from her own habit of inconstancy, establishes the essential equality of the sexes in the realm of physical love, which, for Rochester, is the only kind.

Because Rochester's poem is a kind of debate it can do little more than limn a conflict and bring it to a resolution. In the conflict and resolution a number of anti-Platonic factors have been revealed. However,

it is still not entirely clear whether the philosophy dramatized in this poem would be embraced as a way of life. Is Rochester presenting a clever dramatic creation, a purely intellectual concept, or a program for living? While there is no final answer to this question, it seems that men really did live by the philosophy reflected in the poem and they accepted all its implications. One of Sir Charles Sedley's little poems can illustrate further the moral and social ramifications of following such a philosophy:

Phillis is my only joy,  
Faithless as the Winds or Seas;  
Sometimes coming, sometimes coy,  
Yet she never fails to please;

If with a frown  
I am cast down  
Phillis smiling  
And beguiling

Makes me happier than before.  
Tho', alas, too late I find  
Nothing can her fancy fix;  
Yet the moment she is kind  
I forgive her all her tricks

Which tho' I see  
I can't get free;  
She deceiving  
I believing

What need lovers wish for more?<sup>20</sup>

According to this poem, when woman steps out of her "chast bowr" man had better be prepared to be deceived. Sedley accepts Phillis's deceptions as naturally as he would a minor quirk of temperament, but not necessarily because he is passionately in love with her. He accepts her falsehoods because she is consistently pleasurable to be with; she "never fails to please." The poet's mood seems to depend on Phillis's treatment of him.

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<sup>20</sup>Vivian de Sola Pinto, (ed.) The Poetical and Dramatic Works of Sir Charles Sedley, 2 vols. (New York, 1969), I, 41.

Her inconstancy must cause him some irritation, otherwise there would be no point in admitting, "I forgive her all her tricks." Yet how easily she can dispel his irritation simply by being "kind." It is the pleasure in the relationship that matters and not the fidelity it should inspire. Sedley's poem indicates that with the introduction of the actively sexual female, who ignores the "chast bowr" concept of Spenser, comes the necessity for a kind of blissful cynicism toward sexual idealism, even toward ordinary sexual fidelity. A desire for physical gratification for its own sake, a reduction of the exalted female to the level of the lustful male, an exclusion of any moral component from sexuality, a gay cynicism toward love--these are the chief elements of Restoration anti-Platonism. These elements, their variants and their ramifications will be found represented in the plays of William Wycherley.

If the Restoration wits were capable of composing the elegantly reasoned and wittily turned renunciations of Platonic idealism witnessed in the poems of Rochester and Sedley, they must not be considered ignorant of the science and learning of their time. Indeed, it was this learning that sometimes inspired their anti-Platonism, for behind the rejection of the Platonic image of the woman and the Platonic "purity" of love lay a deeper rejection of all idealism, fostered mainly by the power of materialist philosophy but supported by other intellectual developments, such as the "new science" and skepticism. The influence of Hobbes's philosophy on the thought of the seventeenth century has been well documented. But the particular understanding of Hobbes by the circle of court wits has received far less attention. In their exploitation of Hobbes's thought just what would have appealed to them the most? What would they have selected to include in their own philosophies of life? Clear and direct answers to

these questions are not possible, but it is possible to indicate that the propensities of the court circle were served by the background of Hobbesianism. Moreover, it seems that key figures of the court, including the king himself, were interested in Hobbes's thinking. What possible effect this background had on Wycherley must be inferred from his position at court and from his relationship to this milieu, which will be the subject of the next chapter. But now, let us examine some of the ideas of Hobbes that clearly support the values and practices of some of the court wits.

The ideas of Hobbes having most relevance to an exposition of the Restoration love ethos are those in Leviathan concerning the nature of man. According to Hobbes, man's nature consists of certain faculties, sense, imagination and understanding the chief among them. All of these faculties exist by virtue of motion only. They have no essence except in their operation, and their operation can be reduced to certain movements of material forces. This reduction of sensory experience to physical contact and movement is supported by the Cartesian explanation of the relationship between the soul and the brain. Descartes writes in The Principles of Philosophy:

It is, however, easily proved that the soul feels those things that affect the body not in so far as it is in each member of the body, but only in so far as it is in the brain, where the nerves by their movements convey to it the diverse actions of the external objects that touch the parts of the body in which they are inserted.<sup>21</sup>

Descartes's system of thought was influential in England during the

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<sup>21</sup>Rene Descartes, The Philosophical Works. Trans. E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge, 1967), I, 293.

Restoration period, though not the part of his thought that diverged from pure materialism and from Hobbes's thought. This connection between Cartesianism and Hobbesianism is indicated in the following passage from Francisque Boullier's book, Histoire de la Philosophie Cartesienne:

. . . dans la seconde moitié du dix septième siècle, entre Hobbes et Locke, le cartésianisme y a pénétrée, et une sorte d'école platonicienne et mystique s'y est formée, en opposition non seulement avec la philosophie de Hobbes, mais aussi avec elle de Descartes que la plupart des mystique et des théologiens affectaient de confondre l'une avec l'autre.<sup>22</sup>

Hobbes calls sense the "original fancy." It is the imprint on the sense organ which remains after an object has impinged on it:

The cause of sense, is the external body or object, which presseth the organ proper to the sense, either immediately, as in hearing, seeing, smelling; which pressure by the mediation of the nerves, and other strings and membranes of the body, continued inwards to the brain and heart, causeth there a resistance, or counter pressure, or endeavor of the heart to deliver itself, which endeavor, because outward, seemeth to be some matter without and this seeming or fancy, is that which men call sense.<sup>23</sup>

Implicit in this explanation of sense is the denial that objects enjoy an essence outside their motions. Objects have a real existence, but the essence of them cannot be determined with certainty, since knowledge of them depends on the sense or "fancy" that they are outward. Hobbes's interpretation of the imagination is similarly mechanistic and rests on a physical analogy to the classical laws of motion. In explaining the imagination, Hobbes first establishes the physical analogue:

When a body is once in motion, it moveth, unless something else hinder it, eternally, and whatsoever hindreth it, cannot in an

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<sup>22</sup>(Paris, 1868), p. 502.

<sup>23</sup>The English Works of Thomas Hobbes, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London, 1962) Vol. III, 2. Hereafter referred to as Hobbes.

instant, but in time, and by degrees quite extinguish it.<sup>24</sup>

Hobbes extends this principle of the gradual diminution of motion to the "internal parts of man," where the motions of objects, which lead to our fancy of them takes place. This ever diminishing sense is the imagination. "Imagination," Hobbes writes, "is nothing but decaying sense."<sup>25</sup> This decay of sense is not uncaused. As in physical motion, psychological motion would, if unimpeded, continue unaltered. However, since new sense impressions are always being absorbed, the motions of the old impressions are impeded, as in the motion of a billiard ball obstructed by the motions of other balls, or, to use one of Hobbes's own analogies, as the rays from the sun would be obscured by the interference from clouds. In the imagination it works the same way:

And any object being removed from our eyes, though the impression it made in us remain, yet other objects more present succeeding, and working on us, the imagination of the past is obscured and made weak, as the voice of a man is in the noise of the day.<sup>26</sup>

Understanding, like imagination and sense, is governed by the laws of motion. It is nothing more than the systematic use of the imagination, functioning by the assistance of signs, especially language:

The imagination that is raised in man, or any other creature indued with the faculty of imagining, by words, or other voluntary signs, is that we generally call understanding.<sup>27</sup>

Such ideas as these do not in themselves imply a set of doctrines or a program of living, but the implications of them, if pursued in a certain way, could lead to doctrines and actions of a very distinctive sort. For example, if objects can be reduced to motion, then the meaning of those objects depends on the way those motions are perceived. In itself an object, though existent, would not be capable of an objective definition,

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 4    <sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 4.    <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 5.    <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 23.



for how it is perceived will vary with the angle of its pressure on the sense organ and with the amount and kind of interference to its motion. Such an analysis of the physical world opens the door to a relativism of experience and of knowledge that can easily lead to a relativism of ethics. Furthermore, if an image in the imagination is effaced by subsequent experience, then no consequence of an action need remain to plague the memory. A conscience made uneasy by the recollection of a despicable act can evade the pangs of remorse by obscuring the old image with new ones, by taking in more experiences. Action rather than contrite reflection allays guilt. For a follower of Hobbes's theory it would be inadvisable to contemplate guilt in an effort to understand the evil which caused it and thereby to avoid the evil in the future. It would be much more efficacious, following Hobbes's theory, to plunge directly into action. Hobbes's theory itself is neutral as to the kind of action to be taken. It would be as logical to perform good works as to indulge in sensualism. The implication that action is preferable to reflection in no way prescribes the kind of action and by no means suggests that any conceivable action is the moral equivalent of any other. But two points are necessary to remember. First, in reducing all reality to physical motion, Hobbes has removed any spiritual imperative to perform acts that claim to be morally superior to all other acts. Second, the tenor of the Hobbesian philosophy, which is to the effect that consequences are not permanent, must lead to a relaxation of inhibitions on traditionally proscribed actions. Thus, even in the setting forth of his basic principles of human nature, where he seems far from dealing with topics connected to human conduct in everyday life, Hobbes unintentionally offers a framework to those who would act without thought to consequences.

In later sections of Leviathan, Hobbes fortifies the motivation of those who would construe his theory of human nature as a license for action without regard to consequences. In Chapter III, he denies the possibility of knowing the infinite: "Whatsoever we imagine, is finite," he asserts.<sup>28</sup> "Therefore there is no idea, or conception of anything we call infinite."<sup>29</sup> The Platonic idea that an ascent to the ideal is possible, albeit difficult, is smashed by this denial of the capability of man even to imagine the infinite. Further, Hobbes insists that our idea of God is not one in which we can have some assurance founded on his physical manifestations or on a mystical comprehending of him. Rather, the idea of God is purely and simply a necessity imposed on us by the deity's demand for worship: "The name of God is used, not to make us conceive him, for he is incomprehensible . . . ; but that we may honor him."<sup>30</sup> Theology, it seems, is useless, except perhaps as an adjunct of liturgy. Equally useless, though, if Hobbes's idea is carried to its logical extreme, is any religion or any system of morality proceeding from a definition of God and a conception of His purposes. For if He is truly incomprehensible, then who is to say whether or not he performs God's will when he is doing this or that particular act? As to Hobbes's general notions of epistemology, they are similarly materialistic and rest on a similar denial of the possibility of man's penetration into spiritual reality. Intuition, mystical experience, the Platonic transcendence of the concrete world--all would be reduced to material causation under Hobbes's system. All would be stripped of their spiritual attractiveness and rendered dully mechanistic. Hobbes is a far cry from the Platonism of the Renaissance. Even the oblique, metaphorical use of language is outlawed,

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 17.    <sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 17.    <sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

because, according to Hobbes, reason can progress only by the use of unambiguous language:

. . . the light of human minds is perspicuous words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity; reason is the pace; increase of science is the way; and the benefit of mankind is the end. And on the contrary, metaphors, and senseless ambiguous words, are like ignes fatui . . . .

It is not difficult to infer that anyone imbued with Hobbesian attitudes would be very resistant to the appeal of idealism, skeptical of the idea of transcendence and contemptuous of the blandishments of romance. That many Restoration poets and playwrights were so imbued has been well documented.<sup>32</sup>

In Hobbes's more restricted discussion of the passions in Chapter VI, Part I of Leviathan we find him proceeding logically from his materialist bias to an explanation of love and hate perfectly in accord with his theory that motion is the key to perception, knowledge and action. In Hobbes's view the general passion of love consists merely in the desire for something; hate consists in the aversion to something.<sup>33</sup> Hobbes defines the motive force of many passions, labelling some with honorific names, such as "magnanimity," others with pejorative names, such as "pusillanimity." Among these passions he lists "the passion of love," which he says consists of "Love of one singularly, with desire to be singularly loved."<sup>34</sup> The very next passion on the list is jealousy, which, according to Hobbes's definition, is "the same, with fear that the love is not mutual."<sup>35</sup> In other words, nothing separates jealousy from love except the fear in jealousy that one is

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 36-37.

<sup>32</sup>See Louis Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden (Ann Arbor, 1934) and Samuel Mintz, The Hunting of Leviathan (Cambridge, 1962).

<sup>33</sup>Hobbes, p. 40. <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 44. <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

not "singularly loved" as one desires. Both these passions, love and jealousy, Hobbes seems to regard as undesirable. This is suggested by the connotations of their definitions and also by the context of their position in the list. They are surrounded on the list by such passions as "natural lust," "luxury," and "revengefulness." Hobbes apparently, therefore, conceives of two kinds of love. There is the general kind consisting merely of the desire for something, and the passionate kind, which is the specific desire to be singularly loved and which can be a component of jealousy. The first kind would be a natural necessity in Hobbes's thinking, if man is to be anything but totally reactive and inert. It is essential to the living of life, to progress and to self-fulfillment. The second kind has connotations of a selfish, petty demand for affection. It is easy to see that the "passion of love" and its companion, jealousy, would make logical objects for satire. Indeed, they are treated satirically, for instance in the naive devotion of young Bellair to Emilia in The Man of Mode or in Pinchwife's absurd passiveness in The Country Wife. The general love is, according to Hobbes's reasoning, essential to life itself, for without movement man atrophies, and without action he dies:

Nor can man live whose desires are at an end than he whose senses and imagination are at a stand. Felicity is a continued progress of the desire from one object to another, the attaining of the former being still but the way to the latter.<sup>36</sup>

How familiar is this principle in Restoration comedy. It is the rationale behind the conduct of Dorimant and Horner. It is the premise underlying the comic subplot of Dryden's Marriage a la Mode. Doralice sings of this principle in the song that opens the play, and characteristically, she applies the principle specifically to marriage:

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

Why should a foolish marriage vow,  
Which long ago was made,  
Oblige us to each other now  
When passion is decayed?  
We lov'd, and we lov'd, as long as we would.  
Till our love was lov'd in us both:  
But our marriage is dead, when the pleasure is fled:  
'Twas pleasure first made it an oath.<sup>37</sup>

This song epitomizes the attitude toward love found in many Restoration comedies. It is typical of the cynicism already noted in the poetry of Rochester and Sedley. Its distinction lies in the candor with which it dismisses the "foolish marriage vow" as a binding obligation on the lovers. It says quite clearly and without compunction that desire is more important than duty, that passion, which is subject to decay, is the source of pleasure, and that pleasure alone cements the conjugal union. Nothing but pleasure is sacred, and pleasure means physical gratification, a most mutable thing.

Besides the actual principles composing Hobbes's theory of man's nature which might become part of the rationale for the Restoration love ethos, there were two more general effects of his intellectual presence which must be included in a survey of his possible influence. I refer to Hobbes's statements about the nature of society and to his predominance over the intellectual life of his period. On the first point, I quote from a recent study of Hobbes's influence during the seventeenth century, in which the author makes a specific reference to Hobbes's impact on comedy:

The attitude towards life displayed in the comedies of Dryden, Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve may be described as roughly analogous to Hobbes's view of the state of nature, at least insofar as the rakes who move through the plays are licentious, predatory and rapacious. . . . Thus, if the gallants in these plays attempted to justify their conduct at all, it was by reference to what man is, not to what he ought to be.

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<sup>37</sup>John Dryden, "Marriage a la Mode," in Eighteenth Century English Literature, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson, Paul Fussell, et al (New York, 1969), p. 95.

and what man is in these plays is a dramatized and highly stylized version of what man is in Hobbes's state of nature, with added touches furnished from popular misconceptions of Epicurean philosophy.<sup>38</sup>

Hobbes himself may have seen the state of nature as a terrifying jungle which man had to struggle to subdue, mainly by subduing himself and by subordinating his will-to-power to the demands of order and stability. But the rakes who used, or misused, Hobbes's ideas looked upon the state of nature as the arena for an exciting competition among egos, each striving to surpass the others, to excel in the most thrilling game society could offer--the game of love. One might say that in a comedy such as The Man of Mode the hero seized his opportunities and advanced himself in the contest of love in a manner similar to that in which the hero of the heroic tragedy did in the contest of politics. Hobbes himself affirms the basic reason for these two modes of action when he writes: "I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, that ceaseth only in death."<sup>39</sup> Compelling both the lover and the conquerer, the rake and the tyrant is the will to power, and the will to power is relentless. To cease struggling for supremacy is to die. Hobbes saw in this egoism a dreadful force which had to be curbed as rigorously as was necessary for the maintenance of order.<sup>40</sup> However, this part of Hobbes's thinking was not the part borrowed by the wits.

The second general influence of Hobbes upon the love ethos of his time cannot be illustrated by a quotation or pinned down by a reference, because it does not consist of a theory or an opinion. Rather it is an ambience, a

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<sup>38</sup>Samuel Mintz, The Hunting of Leviathan (Cambridge, 1962), p. 139.

<sup>39</sup>Hobbes, p. 85.

<sup>40</sup>See Part II of Leviathan, especially chap. XXIX for Hobbes's arguments for a strong central government and absolute control.

mood, which Hobbes must have inspired by the boldness of his thinking. Hobbes comes on the crest of the scientific wave that led to the "breaking of the circle" that had unified medieval thought. Copernicus, Galileo, Descartes and others had brought about the collapse of established traditions in religion, philosophy and morals. It is no accident that Platonism as it appears in the poetry of Sydney and Spenser becomes, just a few years later, in the poetry of Waller, mere metaphorical leftovers. When science reveals the physical basis of all that had previously seemed spiritual, how can a thoroughly idealistic philosophy hope to survive? Hobbes came as the climax to this whole movement because of the fearlessness with which he expressed his materialism. He was blunt; he was eloquent; he was lucid; what's more, he was favored at court. For all these reasons he was listened to, and his words could not help but stir men to an awareness of hitherto unconsidered possibilities of freedom. At the same time, though, what a disorientation must have occurred, what a pulling of the self to and fro between the poles of duty and pleasure. Consider the spectacle of Rochester whose personality was "complex and contradictory."<sup>41</sup> He was a "genuinely affectionate husband" and yet he had the reputation of being "the wittiest scapegrace and most aggressive libertine of his time."<sup>42</sup> For men who were intelligent, bold and curious Hobbes must have been exhilarating. But if these men were also sensitive and compassionate, Hobbes's philosophy might very well have been disturbing.

Though Hobbes played a leading role in producing the climate of opinion that prevailed during his time, it would be unwise to conclude that he was entirely responsible for the ideas circulating among the court wits

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<sup>41</sup>Mintz, p. 140.    <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

and writers. He offered a systematically argued philosophy of materialism which could and did promote relativism in thinking and probably a libertinism in conduct. But others contributed to the libertinism of the period. Two of the assumptions of the libertine mode of life derived from Hobbes were these: Nothing is of permanent or absolute value, and nothing can be known except what is lived. Both these ideas received support from the new science, represented by the Royal Society and by the fashionable skepticism found in Montaigne, Thomas Browne and other widely read authors.<sup>43</sup> The empiricism heralded by Bacon had become, by the time of the Restoration, more than just a formal method of discovery. It had become a practical way of finding truths of various sorts. Not only the truths of physical science but of everyday life were considered susceptible to empirical discovery and validation. It cannot be demonstrated, perhaps, with incontrovertible evidence that the experimental programs of the Royal Society infiltrated morals and led to an attempt to "rationalize sexual relationships," to use Bonamy Dobree's phrase.<sup>44</sup> But one effect the experimental attitude did have was to reinforce the Hobbesian rejection of the spiritual values of the past. It is true that the Royal Society waged incessant war against the atheistical implications of Hobbesianism. We see the example of Robert Boyle, one of the finest scientific minds of the time, writing the Christian Virtuoso in an effort to prove that "a Great Esteem of Experience [Experimentalism] and a high veneration of Religion are compatible in the same person."<sup>45</sup> But it is also true that the Society blunted its own weapons when it

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<sup>43</sup>For the summary of the new science and skepticism I have relied on chaps. II and III of Louis Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden

<sup>44</sup>Restoration Comedy (Oxford, 1956), p. 23.    <sup>45</sup>(London, 1690), p. 2.



dismissed the theological foundations of Christianity as so much verbiage.

In his History of the Royal Society, Thomas Sprat follows Bacon's example and maintains that there is a division between matters of nature and matters of spirit, the first of which compose the proper subject of science, the second, the proper subject of theology. Sprat argues that traditional theology is useful only to "defend the church against Heresies and schisms."<sup>46</sup> Then he goes on to cast doubt even on this limited usefulness:

And yet I should not doubt, to prove, that even in Divinity itself, they [theological reasonings] are not so necessary as they are reputed to be: And that all or most of our Religious controversies, may as well be decided by plain reason, and by considerations, which may be fetch'd from the religion of mankind, the nature of Government, and humane society, and Scripture itself, as by the multitudes of authorities, and subtleties of disputes, which have been heretofore used.<sup>47</sup>

Sprat is rejecting the authority of the past and with it the faith in traditional truth. If truth is to be fetched from the "Religion of mankind, the nature of government and humane society," then it cannot be a permanent truth, for all of these things change continually. If truth is to rest on Scripture, then, as the history of Protestant sectarianism demonstrates, it will vary from interpreter to interpreter, and, in keeping with Sprat's appeal to "plain reason," every man will be his own interpreter. The framework of Sprat's thinking is obviously a Protestant one, not an irreligious one. But on those minds not otherwise disposed to strong faith Sprat's point of view might very well encourage the atheism and irreligion the Royal Society was attempting to defeat. Boyle was well aware of this possibility. For the man of strong faith, experimental science can be a

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<sup>46</sup>Thomas Sprat, The History of the Royal Society (St. Louis, 1959), p. 22.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

boon:

And I hope it will appear that, if, the Experimental way of philosophizing I am addicted to, have any things in it that indispose a man to assent to the Truth, and live according to the Laws of the Christian Religion; those few things are more than countervailed by the peculiar advantages, that it affords a man of well-disposed mind, towards the being a good Christian.<sup>48</sup>

But Boyle emphasizes that only a certain type of man, indeed a rare type, "one that is both docile and inclined to make pious applications of the Truths he discovers"<sup>49</sup> would be able to reconcile experimental science and Christian faith. It is difficult to imagine how there can exist an absolute standard of moral conduct without an absolute standard of truth. Without an absolute standard how does one go about devising one's own standard? There can be only one answer: By the same method by which Sprat, defending the practices of The Royal Society, claims that truth can be discovered in the area of physical existence, by wide ranging experimentation. Sprat, after systematically exposing the inadequacies and errors of the inherited philosophies, considers the "Modern Experimenters." These have

Not only disagreed from the Antients, but have also proposed to themselves the right course of slow, sure experimenting: and have prosecuted it as far, as the shortness of their own lives or the multiplicity of their other affairs, or the narrowness of their fortunes, have given them leave.<sup>50</sup>

Like Hobbes, The Royal Society could not help but promote a distrust of established authority and an impulse of curiosity and even daring toward the discovery of truth by means of experimentation. In the sciences, of course, experimentation is a rigorously controlled, seriously undertaken endeavor. Sprat calls for "slow, sure experimenting." In the area of personal ethics, however, experimentation often consists of the mere accumulation of experience uninhibited by moral discrimination or compunction. It is not necessary to

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<sup>48</sup>Boyle, P. 3. <sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 3. <sup>50</sup>Sprat, p. 35. LOYOLA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

argue that the libertines deliberately set out to destroy a moral code by using their own lives as the evidence of its obsolescence. They did not model their licentiousness on the scientific method practiced by The Royal Society, and to state that they did would be to slander The Royal Society. But the latitude for their actions had been set by the assertions of the Society. Thus, any natural impulse toward libertinism was furthered by the influence of the most prestigious group of thinkers of the time, just as it had been furthered by the arguments of the foremost philosopher of the time.

Additional support to the revolt against the authority of absolutes was lent by the philosophy of skepticism, currently popular. Traditional skepticism originated with Pyrrho of Elis, a Greek philosopher who served with Alexander the Great.<sup>51</sup> It was disseminated by the writings of Sextus Empiricus, who lived around 22 A.D. It found its way into the stream of seventeenth century thought through the writings of Thomas Browne and Michel de Montaigne, both of whom reasoned that for every piece of knowledge man could acquire there was a contradictory piece, which, in effect, nullified its truth. The relatively uncomplicated premise of skepticism is expounded by Sextus Empiricus in his work, Outlines of Pyrrhonism. According to Sextus Empiricus the skeptic never resorts to dogma, "using 'dogma' in the sense which some give it, of 'assent to one of the non-evident objects of scientific inquiry'; for the Pyrrhonian philosopher assents to nothing that is non-evident."<sup>52</sup> The only things that were not non-evident were immediate sense perceptions such as hot and cold. As Professor Bredvold notes, the logical consequence of traditional skepticism was conservatism:

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<sup>51</sup>This brief summary of Skepticism is based on Bredvold, chap. II.

<sup>52</sup>Trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), p. 11.

However upsetting these doctrines were, their practical outcome was the very opposite of revolutionary. For since true knowledge is unattainable, it is futile to argue or quarrel over it, to sacrifice comfort or life for it; it is as well to conform to the custom of the country, to worship the gods as they are worshipped by the others. Neither you nor anyone else can demonstrate that you would be wrong.<sup>53</sup>

The tendency of skepticism to encourage conformity is, logically speaking, parallel to the intention of Hobbes to bring about civil order by establishing the need for absolute authority. But once again we are confronted with a doctrine which, in its bare form, stripped of its fully articulated meaning would be an invitation to spurn established standards. Philosophers who might recognize the desirability of strong codes might proceed from skepticism to conservatism, but impetuous aristocrats already mistrustful of cogitation and inclined toward action would be more likely to ignore the assumption that some established controls are necessary for civilized life and prefer to act as though no code was worth the trouble of its observance. At the very least a bifurcation of values might be considered inevitable under the influence of Hobbesianism, the new science and skepticism. In the realm of politics, a strong monarch was felt to be essential to man's happiness, and stability of government was set up as the highest good on earth. Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel is a vast poetic argument supporting precisely these values. But in the realm of personal conduct, such submission to authority as Dryden recommends would not be scrupulously required, as Dryden's witty toleration of Charles's promiscuity and Charles's own indulgence of Monmouth's clearly indicate. Thus, the curious situation existed during the Restoration in which the most conservative royalists were the most licentious rakes, and the king himself, while an exemplary

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<sup>53</sup>Bredvold, pp. 19-20.

ruler in some ways and certainly not averse to the royal exercise of authority, sets an example of loose sexual conduct virtually unprecedented in English history. Bishop Burnet offers a portrait of Charles that perfectly captures this combination of high intelligence, political authoritarianism and personal licentiousness, and indicates the historical and philosophical roots of it.

The king was then [in 1660] thirty years of age, and, as might have been supposed, past the levities of youth and the extravagance of pleasure. He had a good understanding. He knew well the state of affairs both at home and abroad. He had a softness of temper that charmed all who came near him, till they found how little they could depend on good looks, kind words and fair promises . . . . He seemed to have no sense of religion: both at prayers and sacrament, he, as it were, took care to satisfy people that he was in no way concerned in that about which he was employed. . . . He said once to myself he was no atheist, but he could not think God would make a man miserable, only for taking a little pleasure out of the way. But when he talked freely, he could not help letting himself out against the liberty, that, under the reformation, all men took of inquiring into matters of religion: for, from their inquiring into matters of religion, they carried the humour further and inquired into matters of state. He said often he believed government was a much safer and easier thing, where the authority was believed infallible, and the faith and submission of the people implicit.<sup>54</sup>

Charles also epitomizes the contradictions already noted in the character of Rochester. One of Charles's biographers, Arthur Bryant, records the events at a ball given by the king on New Year's eve, 1662, at which Charles called for "Cuckolds awry, the old dance of England."<sup>55</sup> Bryant tells us that:

In that immortal phrase, uttered amid the laughter and fiddlers beneath the tall wax candles, the King epitomized his court. Love was the main pursuit.<sup>56</sup>

Charles's reckless gallantry created endless scandal at court. He was wont

<sup>54</sup>Gilbert Burnet, History of His Own Times (London, 1883), p. 61.

<sup>55</sup>Arthur Bryant, The England of Charles II (London, 1935), p. 157.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

to publicly promenade with his wife, his mistress and his illegitimate children, all in his company at the same time. Such disregard for appearances shocked his subjects. Among the many references in Pepys' Diary to the low manners of the Court lies one that hints at the disgust shared by Pepys and his fellow diarist, John Evelyn, a man vastly different in temperament. Pepys records that he spent part of January 29, 1665 with Evelyn "talking of the vanity and vices of the Court, which makes it a most contemptible thing."<sup>57</sup> Charles's brother, the Duke of York, was equally libidinous, though less attractive than Charles. It could be truly said that a state of nature prevailed at court. An observer of the courtly scene would see how

. . . Lord Chesterfield, himself no mean cuckold maker, hurried his lady off to lonely Bretby to be out of York's clutches; how little Jermyn, the most absurd of conquerors was banished the court for ogling Barbara [Barbara Villiers, Charles's mistress]; how the king supped three or four nights a week with the scandalous lady.<sup>58</sup>

There are the tales of Rochester's and Sedley's nocturnal raids against chastity, of their excursions into low-life, of their irresponsible pranks and merry masquerades. None of this information requires repetition. What does need to be stressed though is that, following the logical implications of Hobbesianism and Skepticism concerning the authority of the established ruler, these young noblemen would, in all probability, have carried their licentiousness only as far as the king would have tolerated it. But Charles went beyond merely tolerating licentiousness in others. He set the pace for it. As Bishop Burnet ruefully attests: "The mind of his reign, and of all his affairs, was occasioned chiefly by his delivering himself up at his first

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<sup>57</sup>Ed. Henry Wheatley, 9 vols. (New York, 1899), V, p. 198.

<sup>58</sup>Bryant, p. 157.

coming over to a mad range of pleasure."<sup>59</sup> Yet there was a slight contradiction, for Charles preserved an ideal of womanhood despite all his rakishness. This ideal was embodied in his sister, Henrietta, Minette, as he affectionately called her. After his restoration to the throne, Charles could not be happy until Minette was brought from France to join him.<sup>60</sup> She was his confidante and comforter, and he treated her with a tenderness and solicitousness approaching reverence.<sup>61</sup> Thus, in the character of Charles, just as, seemingly, in the character of Rochester, there existed an apparent compartmentalization. All women except one were the prizes in the game of love, and to the victorious went the best of the lot. But this one woman was honored and cherished. In Rochester's case she was respected as a loyal wife. In Charles's case she was revered as an unsullied sister. In itself this contradiction is not extraordinary, perhaps not even noteworthy. But it does serve to indicate the danger in assuming that the rakes carried on a deliberate execution of the concepts of Hobbes, or of Skepticism, or of the new science. These concepts furnished the sanction for the rejection of moral authority, of established traditions and of absolute truths. Hobbes and the new science also furnished a hint as to the proper way of life for their contemporaries when they insisted respectively that the will to power was the essence of life and that only experimentation was capable of discovering truth. But there was no program uncritically adopted and consistently followed. Not even Charles was prepared to exclude every trace of idealism from his life. Therefore, we should not expect to find in the better comedies of the period a direct support of the principles of any of these philosophies. If the men who

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<sup>59</sup>Burnet, p. 61. <sup>60</sup>Bryant, p. 77. <sup>61</sup>Ibid., passim.

imbibed the concoction served up by Hobbes, the new science and Skepticism retained their somewhat mixed natures, then we should expect that the art which purported to imitate their manners will also be mixed. It must also be remembered that the love ethos of the Restoration, having thoroughly abandoned Platonism, based itself on a misunderstanding of Hobbes's intentions and on a rather subjective application of the implications of the new science and of Skepticism. All of these influences were more comprehensive and more complex than were the patterns of conduct which derive from them. It should not be surprising, then, if in the course of examining the plays of Wycherley we discover notions, aspects or representations of love which do not follow exactly from the background I have just outlined. Yet without an awareness of this background, many important love themes in the plays would be mere inexplicable curiosities. The assumptions that permeated Wycherley's milieu are important to an understanding of his treatment of one of the major preoccupations of his time, love. In this chapter I have attempted to expose some of these assumptions, those which I believe are of greatest importance.



## CHAPTER II

### WYCHERLEY'S REPRESENTATIONS OF LOVE: CRITICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

It can scarcely be doubted that the love ethos of the Restoration court affected sexual conduct among the members of the court. Some Restoration theories of drama, especially those governing comedy, would have dictated a faithful representation of this conduct, since it was part of reality, and one of the dramatist's obligations was the faithful representation of reality. We find, for example, a defense of realism in A Comparison between Two Stages, a series of witty dialogues published in 1702 and usually attributed to Charles Gildon. In one of these dialogues, Ramble protests against too much reality in the drama. Sullen replies:

I would have a play founded either on Truth, or some story very near it . . . ; what d'you think of Sir Fopling, Plain Dealer, She Wou'd if She cou'd, several of Shakespeare's, some of Fletcher's, all of Ben's; in these Nature is followed so close, we take the picture to be the life: nor are they less diverting, for being confined within reason.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the playwright was unquestionably expected to depict reality. At the same time the angle from which he could choose to depict it was not all that clear. If the proclivities of the audience influence the nature of drama, as Neander in Dryden's Essay of Dramatic Poesy maintains, then how much greater an influence would there be on the plays written to delight the coterie of the king, a coterie of which the Restoration comic dramatist

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<sup>1</sup>Staring B. Wells, (ed.), Princeton, N.J., 1942, p. 78.

was himself a member. Since for this segment of society sexual relationships were a preoccupation, and in some cases an obsession, the portion of reality available to the Restoration comic dramatist was rigorously circumscribed. To depict reality and simultaneously reflect the lives of his audience in that which was of importance to them meant to represent sexual relationships. Besides depicting reality and reflecting the tastes of his audience, however, the playwright was thought to have a third responsibility: To improve the conduct of men. In his Essay of Dramatic Poesy Dryden reminds us of this responsibility. According to Lisideius's definition, a play has as its dual purpose "the delight and instruction of mankind."<sup>2</sup> This is the core of defenses of drama as far back as Sydney's defense against Gosson's School of Abuse. The rapidity of reform in the drama following Collier's Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage (1698)<sup>3</sup> suggests that dramatists dared not take lightly their moral responsibility for very long. Given these obligations--to represent reality, to accommodate subject to audience and to instruct in morality--the practical choices facing the dramatists were not easy ones, for it was not always possible to satisfy all three responsibilities simultaneously. The playwright often had to make a difficult choice: Should he confine himself to depictions of the frivolity and sensuality of the court merely to indulge the narcissistic desires of his peers? Or should he assume a moral stance from which to expose the disparity between proper modes of conduct and the behavior of his characters, who presumably realistically represent the audience watching the play? Frothy

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<sup>2</sup>Essays, 2 vols. Ed. W. P. Ker (Oxford, 1900), I, 36.

<sup>3</sup>See George H. Nettleton, English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century (New York, 1914), pp. 146-48 and John Palmer The Comedy of Manners (London, 1913), pp. 6-12.

comedies of manners or serious satires; these were the major opposing possibilities. Dryden resolved the dramatist's dilemma by yoking together comedies of manners (which, incidentally, contained much that was satirical) and serious political dramas. In one of the earliest of these "tragicomedies," Secret Love (1667), for example, Dryden takes a high plot concerned with the agonies of a beautiful queen forced to choose between love and duty and unites it with a low plot delineating the courtship of Caladon, a charming womanizer, and Florimell, an independent-minded young woman. This courtship anticipates that of Millament and Mirabell and even contains a proviso scene.<sup>4</sup> Dryden makes no effort to satirize the conduct of Florimell and Caladon, though he does make a satirical contrast between the honest sensuality of these young lovers and the hypocrisy of the other low-plot characters. In Secret Love--and the same applies even to Marriage a la Mode--Dryden seems mainly interested in using the low plot as a "comedy of manners," the satire of which is directed against those who lack the wit to live up to the sexual code they attempt to follow. It is in the high plot that Dryden offers his serious comments on honor, duty, liberality and other moral virtues. The world of the comic low-plot is one in which, if one is young, witty and daring, one need never exert moral effort, for no moral challenges exist. As Caladon announces virtually the moment he steps on stage, "I never yet knew any company I could not be merry in, except it were an old woman's."<sup>5</sup>

But Dryden's solution was not Wycherley's. Wycherley chose the vehicle of comedy to carry all his themes from the frivolous to the profound. The development of Restoration Comedy shows that Wycherley's choice was more

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<sup>4</sup>L. A. Beaurline and F. Bowers, (ed.), John Dryden: Four Comedies (Chicago, 1967), p. 97.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

viable than Dryden's. The division of critical opinion as to the value of Wycherley's comedies indicates, however, that his genius is not easily defined. Wycherley's reputation among critics seems to be a consequence of how each critic interprets Wycherley's solution of the dilemma facing Restoration comic dramatists. His contemporaries tended to assume that his purposes were satiric. Congreve, for example, indicates the intent of his own Love for Love by announcing in the "Prologue" that

Since The Plain Dealer's scenes of manly rage,  
Not one has dared to lash this crying age.<sup>6</sup>

Dryden in his tribute to Congreve's The Double Dealer acknowledges "The satire, wit and strength of Manly Wycherley."<sup>7</sup> Even Steele, speaking from a post-Collier vantage point, vindicates the dedication of The Plain Dealer as an "ironical commendation"<sup>8</sup> and a "Masterpiece of Raillery" on "the vice of procuring."<sup>9</sup> At least in The Plain Dealer, then, Wycherley was considered a serious satirist. But this view of Wycherley has not necessarily prevailed and today one is also offered the view of Wycherley as a dramatist who chose to celebrate frivolity and was "a gentleman and a courtier by profession and a dramatist for fun."<sup>10</sup> Or one can believe that Wycherley struggled on the horns of the dilemma and regard him as a rake manqué "whose joy was spoiled by his Puritanism."<sup>11</sup> To complicate things a little, if one observes that

<sup>6</sup>Plays, ed. by Havelock Ellis, The Mermaid Series (London, 1887), p. 197.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>8</sup>The Spectator, ed. by Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1965), II, 537.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>John H. Wilson, The Court Wits of the Restoration (Princeton, 1948), p. 6.

<sup>11</sup>Bonamy Dobree, Restoration Comedy (Oxford, 1924), p. 85.

satire is Wycherley's choice, then one might conclude that "he loses the philosophical detachment so essential to any true expression of the Comic Spirit."<sup>12</sup> Did Wycherley dabble in the drama for mere amusement? Did he use the stage to express his disapproval of his contemporaries? Or was he torn between acceptance and revulsion? One could evade the second and third questions by arguing that Wycherley was fashioning something of artistic beauty without concern for its moral dimension. This view would agree with Charles Lamb's premise when he argues that the characters of Restoration comedy inhabit "a world of themselves almost as much as a fairyland."<sup>13</sup> This is a world beyond both acceptance and revulsion. Since it is beyond the reach of either praise or blame, it is morally irrelevant. "We are not to judge them by our usages,"<sup>14</sup> says Lamb. "There is neither right nor wrong."<sup>15</sup> Most critics have refused to accept Lamb's interpretation. Yet Lamb affords an insight not deserving of disdain, though he may overstate its truths. The fairyland atmosphere is discernible in scenes from Love in a Wood and The Gentleman Dancing Master, though it does become difficult to reconcile Lamb's view with the scenes, situations and characters of Wycherley's two later plays. William Hazlitt feels almost exactly the opposite about Wycherley's characters. They are not fantasy creations. Hazlitt maintains that "we remember Wycherley's characters and the incidents they meet with, just as if they were real."<sup>16</sup> To this assertion Hazlitt adds the opinion that Wycherley's skill at characterization was employed with a definite moral purpose. He recommends, for example, that we give Horner

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<sup>12</sup>Henry ten Eyck Perry, The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama (New Haven, 1925), p. 55.

<sup>13</sup>Essays of Elia (London, 1954), p. 167. <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 168. <sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Lectures on the English Comic Writers (London, 1819), p. 146.

"every sort of consideration and forgiveness, both for his display of ingenuity, and the deep insight he discovers into human nature--such as it was at the time of Wycherley."<sup>17</sup> Thus, for Hazlitt, Wycherley's purpose was to reveal human nature by means of skilful characterization. When he turns to The Plain Dealer, Hazlitt specifically praises Wycherley's moral function. He calls this play "a most severe and poignant satire"<sup>18</sup> and goes on to claim that

no one can read this play without feeling the better for it as long as he lives. It penetrates to the core; it shows the immorality and hateful effects of duplicity, by showing it fixing its harpy fangs in the heart of an honest and worthy man.<sup>19</sup>

Hazlitt's high praise of Wycherley's moral purpose should be considered next to Lord Macaulay's strictures in order for the reader to fully appreciate the critical controversy engendered by the critics' various interpretations of Wycherley's solution to the dilemma facing the Restoration comic dramatist. Macaulay excoriates the whole of Restoration comedy, which he labels "a disgrace to our language and our national character."<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, Macaulay find the chief fault of Restoration comedy not in its offenses against taste or the Victorian moral code but in its "singularly inhuman spirit."<sup>21</sup> Wycherley, he goes on to maintain, is "first, beyond all doubt, in immorality."<sup>22</sup> In a curious way, Macaulay, who sees only vileness in these plays, agrees with Lamb, who sees innocent artificiality. Both disagree with Hazlitt's opinion that the plays offer a view of reality. Both see the plays as essentially unrealistic. The focus of all three critics is identical. It is the treatment of sexual love. It is the representation

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 148.    <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 149.    <sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>20</sup>Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (Philadelphia, 1843), p. 13.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 14.    <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

of sexual relationships that has aroused such contradictory responses as those of Lamb, Hazlitt and Macaulay. This focus, which really develops clearly among the nineteenth century critics, remains in effect today, strongly influencing the limits within which critics are able to construct their interpretations of Wycherley's work. The interpretations of modern critics are more varied and perhaps more sophisticated than those of the nineteenth century. Critics of John Loftis's persuasion, for example, follow the premise that after all is said and done Wycherley is merely another exponent of aristocratic values against the rising middle class. As Loftis asserts: ". . . the sympathy of the dramatists, Massinger, Jonson, Shirley, Wycherley and Congreve was so overwhelmingly on the side of the fashionable that their citizens remained little more than stupid, immoral fools."<sup>23</sup>

Contradicting this view is that of Allardyce Nicoll, who sees Wycherley not as an exponent of a particular class value-system but as a disturbed moralist. He says that in The Plain Dealer "Wycherley separates himself from the regular course of the comedy of manners for inherently he had not the airy, carefree spirit of its other exponents."<sup>24</sup> Mr. Nicoll continues by stating that while "the first three plays are not prevaillingly satiric," The Plain Dealer contains "bitter and indignant satire," with an atmosphere like "that of the Puritan rather than that of a Restoration gentleman."<sup>25</sup> The idea that Wycherley began as a gentlemanly writer of light comedies and converted to satire in his last play is given a

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<sup>23</sup>Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding (Stanford, 1959), p. 20.

<sup>24</sup>British Drama, 4th rev. ed. (London, 1947), p. 253.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

psychological twist in the comment of Joseph Wood Krutch that Etherege accepted the fact of a loss of faith in human nature with "heartless calmness," but Wycherley fulminated against it with "genuine bitterness and disgust."<sup>26</sup> To indicate, finally, the exertions with which modern criticism attempts to expand the limits of meaning for Wycherley's work, there is Norman Holland's theory that Wycherley not only converts to satire but goes beyond it, indeed transcends it:

The Plain Dealer . . . does not simply make a statement about the baseness of The Restoration. In a uniquely comic way it asks a question: can an idealist find his ideal in this imperfect world in which appearances can never really be consistent with nature . . . .<sup>27</sup>

And he goes on: "The Plain Dealer is, like all great comic art, encomium moriae."<sup>28</sup>

This survey of critics suggests the rather confined area within which interpretations of Wycherley can arise, an area that has not been substantially increased even by the scholarship and resourcefulness of twentieth century critics. Where one stands within this area depends very much on the construction one puts on Wycherley's treatment of love, for in the process of finding comedy of manners or profound satire, or perhaps some combination of the two, one cannot avoid considering Wycherley's treatment of love, since this is the chief vehicle for any meanings contained in the plays. Samuel Johnson complained about the drama of his time, that "the universal agent is love, by whose power all good and evil is distributed, and every action quickened or retarded."<sup>29</sup> This complaint would

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<sup>26</sup>Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration (New York, 1924), p. 2.

<sup>27</sup>The First Modern Comedies (Cambridge, 1959), p. 108. <sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>"Preface to Shakespeare" in Rasselas, Poems and Selected Prose, ed. Bertrand Bronson (New York, 1958), p. 242.



certainly be applicable to the plays of Wycherley. However, a careful reader of Wycherley would not be incorrect in qualifying Johnson's further contention that love "has no great influence upon the sum of life."<sup>30</sup> In Wycherley its influence upon the sum of life can be great indeed.

Which of the critical perspectives will be borne out by analysis of the plays? To various extents they will all be, and the very nature of the problem to which each critic addresses his attention indicates the futility of seeking a single right answer. Wycherley's detachment can very easily suggest the artistic "distancing" that would give rise to Lamb's observations. But this detachment often serves the purpose of exposing evil beneath beauty. Hence it functions morally, justifying Hazlitt's view. Certain episodes and characters in Wycherley's plays are scurrilous, and by virtue of their presence Macaulay stands partly vindicated. The whole mixture of effects found in Wycherley makes sense if he is considered in relationship to the Restoration love ethos, both as a holder of some of its intellectual values and as a critic of some of its mores, rather than as an exponent of one or another satirical position or as a mere aristocratic dilettante. Thus this paper adopts what would seem to be a more specific thesis than those of most critics; namely, that Wycherley's plays reveal his attempts to arrive at some kind of moral accommodation with the Restoration love ethos. This thesis may help compose the differences among critical perspectives by simply avoiding the unresolvable issue of whether or not Wycherley's treatment of sexual love, the core of all of his plays, had a reforming intention behind it. Instead it sees Wycherley's treatment of sexual love in relation to a definite code, without attempting the futile

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

task of penetrating his motives. To the extent that it is possible, by means of close analysis of the plays themselves, to gauge the approximate degree to which Wycherley's dramatic representations correspond to or deviate from this code, it would be possible to perceive important differences among Wycherley's four plays and thereby gain a fuller appreciation of his methods and achievements as a dramatist.

But before the plays themselves are examined as exposition of this thesis, it might be useful to glance at the life and character of Wycherley so that the reading of the plays to be subsequently submitted will not be totally detached from whatever biographical framework can be constructed out of available facts. Whether Wycherley's plays are to be judged bagatelles or serious satire, it seems imprudent to assume, as one recent critic does, that "Wycherley the man is of no consequence."<sup>31</sup> Nor does it seem wise to presume, if we find Lamb's view unacceptable, that Wycherley harbored a conventional morality beneath his courtly exterior and that Wycherley the moral man obtruded into his plays. Pope contends that Wycherley adhered to Roman Catholicism all his life,<sup>32</sup> but even if this is a fact, and at least one of Wycherley's biographers denies it,<sup>33</sup> it must be viewed in the light of Pope's own success at synthesizing Christian and neo-classical thought in An Essay on Man, for example. Awareness of Pope's Catholicism would poorly prepare the reader of this poem to appreciate the spirit infusing its sentiments. Awareness of Wycherley's Catholicism would be equally unhelpful to the reader striving to comprehend the sources of the

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<sup>31</sup>Rose Zimbardo, Wycherley's Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire (New Haven, 1965), p. 78.

<sup>32</sup>See Joseph Spence, Anecdotes, Observations and Characters of Books and Men (London, 1858), p. 10.

<sup>33</sup>See Biographia Dramatica, 2 vols. (London, 1813), I, 70.

spirit infusing Wycherley's plays. No reader should feel compelled to accept as the whole truth or even as a significant part of the truth Macaulay's judgment that Wycherley revels in the lasciviousness of his age. But neither need any reader jump to the conclusion that Wycherley attacks this lasciviousness from the standpoint of some established set of religious values. If neither Rochester nor Sedley flinched before the potentially unsettling implications of the Restoration love ethos, then there is no good reason to presume that Wycherley, who was probably as sensitively attuned to court life as were these two aristocrats, would automatically recoil in horror before these implications, which is not to say, of course, that he found them morally acceptable. In the absence of confirming biographical evidence, there is no more reason to believe a priori that Wycherley the satirist fulminated against the world enjoyed by Wycherley the man than there is to believe that Wycherley the man dabbled in playwriting to add a dash of variety to his pleasures. Both beliefs can be persuasively argued, but the truth, if attainable at all, must be sought by means of analysis of the plays. It is true that indications exist of a continuity between Wycherley's life as a member of the court circle and his profession as a playwright. It is also true, however, that the disturbing insinuations of The Country Wife and the savagery of The Plain Dealer bespeak repugnance at all that the life of Town and Court stood for. The explanation of this show of repugnance on the grounds that Wycherley was unable to purge himself of a puritan temper is not wholly satisfying. Neither is the explanation on the grounds that Wycherley was working within an established satirical genre, one of the conventions of which was fulmination. The first explanation seems to ignore certain facts of Wycherley's life. Both explanations seem to preclude a potentiality

for moral rigor and satiric condemnation within the philosophical framework of the Restoration love ethos itself. The sources of the intriguing combination of comic wit and moral indignation, which in my view constitutes the uniqueness of Wycherley's plays, are to be found in the facts of Wycherley's life and in Wycherley's relationship to some of the thinking of his time. The plays themselves indicate that Wycherley may have found within the Restoration love ethos some basis for a moral perspective, at least until the time of the composition of The Plain Dealer.

It is dangerous to put too much stock in the biographical facts of a Restoration or neo-classical artist. But it is even more dangerous to assume that biographical facts have absolutely no relationship to art. The biographical facts of Wycherley's life are fairly clear and leave one with a rather definite impression. Charles Perromat, a French student of Wycherley writes of the young Wycherley:

Wycherley a vingt ans en 1660. Il a reside longtemps en France et y a reçu une education tres speciale. Il a grandi au milieu d'une societe elegante et raffinie; il a apprise a mener une existence large et brillante. Il est admirablement fait pour la vie mondaine. Il est aimable, spirituel, frivole et joyeux, Il a un bonne humeur inalterable. Il sait entre charmant aupres des dames. Il cause bien, cont avec grace, plaisante joliment et tourne de la maniere la plus agreable un compliment galant. Du reste sans grand sens moral, sans grande elevation d'esprit, sans grande sensibilitie ni convictions profondes, avec leger penchant au libertinage: il a l'esprit de sa generation.<sup>34</sup>

Few would want to dispute the facts expressed in this characterization of Wycherley. The question is, what is the connection between the facts and Wycherley's practices as a dramatist, and especially between the facts and Wycherley's treatment of sexual love in his plays. If "il a l'esprit de sa generation," is it necessary to conclude that "l'esprit" was infused

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<sup>34</sup>William Wycherley, Sa Vie, son Oeuvre (Paris, 1921), p. 95.

into his plays? I believe that an examination of Wycherley's treatment of love will lead us to precisely that conclusion, providing we accept a concept of "l'esprit" somewhat broader and considerably more profound in its implications than Perromat obviously intends with his statement. The easy, frivolous atmosphere denoted by Perromat's description adequately suggests the life of the Restoration courtier. But the spirit of the generation of which Wycherley is presumably the exemplar includes much besides this atmosphere. It is in this more inclusive sense, already indicated in Chapter I, that the spirit of the generation must be considered.

Nothing would have been more natural than for Wycherley to have developed an independent and objective determination as to the value of the Restoration love ethos. That he wholeheartedly adopted this ethos as his own, at least for a time, becomes apparent when the facts of his formative years at Oxford, the Inner Temple and London, following his sojourn in France are surveyed. Montague Summers expresses an opinion, when he comments on Wycherley's period at the Inner Temple in the winter of 1660, that agrees substantially with that of each of Wycherley's biographers. He writes:

Wycherley was now fully embarked upon London life, and although it is obvious that he did not entirely neglect the study of law . . . yet it was equally obvious that he would never give himself up to the intricacies of the legal profession. With his handsome face, gay heart, and witty tongue it was impossible that he should not be drawn into the merry carnival of town pleasures whose votaries blithely circled about their monarch mystagogue. Those were the days when every man of fashion, every courtier and coxcomb aspired to the title of author.<sup>35</sup>

Now critics of Macaulay's persuasion have assumed that Wycherley's youthful propensities as described in this passage determined the nature of his

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<sup>35</sup>The Works of William Wycherley, 4 vols. (London, 1924), I, 16.

drama and that each of his plays emerged from the interrelationships between Wycherley and the circle of court wits. Such an assumption could have results most unfortunate for literary history and criticism, not the least of which would be the lumping together of several complex men of various talents and temperaments as though they all belonged to an exclusive sect of libertines and produced their art according to the dictates of the chief libertine and his court.<sup>36</sup> It is salutary to recall that Charles enjoyed the company of Hobbes as well as of Buckingham, of Bishop Burnet as well as of Rochester. It is also steady to be reminded of the fate of Wycherley's plays with respect to the court. Eleanor Boswell does this when she asks:

Why, in spite of Wycherley's success in the public theatre and Castlemaine's influence, was The Plain Dealer the only one of his plays acted at court, and that nine years after its production?<sup>37</sup>

We might also recall Pope's dismissal of the value of Wycherley's court associations. After retailing for Reverend Spence the tale of Wycherley's meeting and subsequent liaison with the Duchess of Cleveland, Pope inquisitively muses, "Yet, after all, what did he get by her? He was to have traveled with the young Duke of Richmond; King Charles gave him, now and then, a hundred pounds, not often."<sup>38</sup>

It is pointless to belabor the uncertainty over Wycherley's place among the court wits and the influence of the court experience upon his

<sup>36</sup>See Kathleen Burton, Restoration Literature (London, 1958), p. 60, in which the "wits" are described as "a well known court circle favored by the King and led by Buckingham, Dorset, Rochester, Sedley, Etherege and Wycherley."

<sup>37</sup>The Restoration Court Stage: 1660-1702 (Cambridge, Mass., 1932), p. 109.

<sup>38</sup>Spence, p. 13.

plays. It would be preferable to recall the indications that though Wycherley did inhale the atmosphere of the court, he inhabited its periphery and not its center. From this peripheral vantage point he would have been less inclined to write as a votary or as an apologist for the love ethos of the wits and more inclined to examine their sexual behavior and his own with an objective eye. This inference is supported by the fact of Wycherley's own sexual pride, which kept him aloof from the sillier excesses of the court wits. In a letter to Mr. -- on the loss of his mistress, Wycherley boasts that "in love I never could be pleased to a height with my own pleasure if I did not find that it added to that of my mistress."<sup>39</sup> This letter was written when the playwright was in his fifty-third year; thus some allowance must be made for the possibility that his recollections were less than totally honest. It is obvious though that his idea of himself as a lover was flattering. Wycherley always placed great stock in his handsome face and witty tongue, and he was most sensitive to their deterioration with age. Pope tells an interesting story in this regard. He remarks that "He (Wycherley) was not unvain of his face."<sup>40</sup> Then goes on as follows:

That is a fine portrait which was engraved by Smith for him in 1703. He was then about his grand climacteric; but sat for the picture from which it was taken when he was about twenty-eight. The motto to it *Quantum mutatis ab illo* was ordered by himself; and he used to repeat it sometimes with a melancholy emphasis.<sup>41</sup>

This motto suggests that Wycherley, perhaps like Byron after him, suffered a premature dread at the loss of youth and became disillusioned with life long before it was necessary to, because, perhaps, he placed too much

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<sup>39</sup>Voiture, Letters of Friendship and Several Other Occasions (London, 1705), p. 28.

<sup>40</sup>Spence, p. 13. <sup>41</sup>Ibid.

faith in the masculine beauty, intelligence and sensual vigor so clearly revealed in the portrait itself.<sup>42</sup> So the impression one receives of Wycherley is that he was a man aware of his sexual attractiveness and proud of it but apprehensive about its durability. It is pointless to attempt to fix the time when Wycherley's apprehesiveness may have begun to stir, but by his twenty-eighth year when the portrait was painted he must have been pondering the transitory nature of physical beauty. At twenty-eight Wycherley had not yet achieved his first dramatic success, nor had he entered into his celebrated affair with the Duchess of Cleveland. The lionization of Wycherley that came with the success of Love in a Wood in 1671 and that included the favors of this famous court lady proved ultimately to be a mixed blessing. Fame may have mitigated the disillusionment suggested by Wycherley's choice of mottoes for his portrait but it seems rash to conclude that fame transformed Wycherley into a light hearted courtier. Wycherley's temperament, even prior to the great disappointments which followed his years of fame, seems at least slightly predisposed toward the jaundiced view taken in his major plays. Indeed, only the niggardliness of Wycherley's father, Daniel, would be enough to dampen the pleasure of a social lion.<sup>43</sup>

Accurate conclusions about Wycherley's life at court are impossible to draw, because details are lacking. Inferences made on the basis of Wycherley's later life indicate that Wycherley was neither a puritan ill-at-ease in Zion nor an unregenerate rake. Insofar as the comments from

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<sup>42</sup>For a print of this portrait see the frontispiece of The Works of William Wycherley, ed. Montague Summers, 4 vols. (London, 1924).

<sup>43</sup>On this, see, e., Willard Connely, Brawny Wycherley (New York, 1930), p. 92.



Wycherley's middle years can be trusted as true reflections of his attitudes while at court, there is much in his Miscellany Poems (1704) that is indicative of his feelings. The same is true of his Miscellaneous Poems (1706). The final poem of this latter collections is entitled "The Court Life." The theme of the poem is that life at court consists of dishonoring oneself for the mere promise of "a servile place."<sup>44</sup> In the final couplet of the poem Wycherley has distilled the essence of social disappointment:

Make many foes, nay be your own;  
To gain a Friend, where there is none.<sup>45</sup>

Yet in Posthumous Poems (1729) which contains many of Wycherley's youthful efforts at verse, there are a number of poems resembling in flippancy the erotic pastorals of Rochester. On the subject of life at court, there is a simile which, though not dissimilar in its conclusions from "The Court Life," differs remarkably in tone:

In Courts, as at Picquet, a shuffling King  
Does the top cards oft to the Bottom bring;  
And in Courts too, as at Picquet, we've seen  
Good cards discarded, and worse taken in.<sup>46</sup>

The complaint is identical to that of the later poem, but absent are the notes of exhaustion and futility. In "The Court Life" Wycherley seems dispirited, even artistically so, hence the flat, literal language. Are the true feelings of Wycherley expressed by this language, or are they caught in the wit of the Picquet conceit? The question is unanswerable, for Wycherley's "true" feelings may have changed from day to day. One thing is clear, however: both poems attest the fact that Wycherley did not rejoice in the life at court. Both poems suggest discontent; "The

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<sup>44</sup>Summers, IV, 72. <sup>45</sup>Ibid. <sup>46</sup>Connely, pp. 48-51.

Court Life" gives intimation of despondency. But hard evidence drawn from Wycherley's life at court on which to erect a theory of the increasing bitterness in his last two plays simply does not exist. Unless the plays themselves are carefully analyzed no theory either of Wycherley's acceptance or rejection of the conduct of the followers of the Restoration love ethos can hope to stand.

Now an interesting fact about Wycherley's relationship to the court during his productive period from 1671-1676 is that he became accepted into the court almost directly as a result of his plays. It was not that his position as a court wit stimulated the writing of his plays. Rather it was precisely the opposite, especially as regards his first two plays. It was the success of the plays that enabled him to become a court wit. Since Wycherley's two later plays, written after he had become established at court, lack the levity and insouciance of the earlier plays, it can scarcely be asserted with any justification that Wycherley's experiences at court were translated into concoctions for the delectation of the hedonistic courtiers. Wycherley was not so much a privileged insider recording the brilliant displays of character and the interesting patterns of human relations observable within the narrow circle of the court as he was an admiring outsider who was permitted to approach the inner circle only as he proved his qualifications by means of his dramatic skill. It is likely that Wycherley had become acquainted with Buckingham, and Rochester and Sedley during his naval service against the Dutch in 1665.<sup>47</sup> But his friendship with Buckingham did not begin until after he had supplanted

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<sup>47</sup>Connely, pp. 48-51.

Buckingham as the lover of the Duchess of Cleveland.<sup>48</sup> His intimacy with Charles could not have been very great at any time after 1671, the year which marked the beginning of his court experience. In 1676, after producing four successful plays and enjoying the adulation of the public, he found it necessary to plead for a pension for Samuel Butler, not directly as one would expect were he on intimate terms with Charles, but through the good offices of Buckingham.<sup>49</sup> And Buckingham seemed not overly zealous in assisting Wycherley's friend, for while he waited for an interview with Butler, arranged by Wycherley, he observed a "pimp of his acquaintance . . . trip by with a brace of ladies. . .," and he "immediately quitted his engagement to follow another kind of business, of which he was more ready than in going to do offices for men of desert."<sup>50</sup> Finally, the qualified favor shown by Charles in appointing Wycherley the tutor of the Duke of Richmond came in 1769, three years after the production of his last play.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the facts suggest that Wycherley indeed had an acquaintance with the court wits, but he was by no means on an equal or necessarily secure footing with them. His place among them was contingent upon several factors--his literary fame, his personal charm and beauty, and his amorous successes. It was an earned place from which Wycherley derived little if any material reward and an indeterminable but probably slight amount of emotional and spiritual gratification. The indications are that Wycherley was too proud to act the literary sycophant in such a situation. He would not have

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<sup>48</sup>Theophilus Cibber, Lives of the Poets, 5 vols. (London, 1753) II, 251.

<sup>49</sup>Connely, p. 129.

<sup>50</sup>Richardson Pack, Some Memoirs of Mr. Wycherley's Life (London, 1728), p. 7.

<sup>51</sup>Connely, p. 159.

flattered the court merely to solidify his position. It is equally unlikely that he was moved by envy of Charles and his circle to satirically demolish their values. It is unnecessary to attribute the viciousness of The Plain Dealer to the pique of a disappointed seeker of court favor. Wycherley's position at court necessitated neither celebration of the Restoration love ethos nor satire of it. He was close enough to observe but detached enough to create dramatic images dictated by the inner logic of the life he observed, filtered through his own peculiar sensibility. If his conduct seemed modelled after the usages of the court, an explanation may be found not in the direct influence of the court but in the fact that both the court and Wycherley accepted the Restoration love ethos. That Wycherley should be able to create an artistic vision not dominated by his association with the court circle should surprise only those who tend to consider loyalty to the court life as a sine qua non of dramatic wit among the Restoration comic dramatists. Such critics--Macaulay was one--tend to lump all the dramatic artists on the scene at the time into one category, which they usually label "wits." Such a view oversimplifies the situation and ignores the differences among individuals. I have already touched on Rochester's depth of character not intimated by his rakish conduct. The reminder of John H. Wilson should be a further warning against hasty generalizations and uncritical categorizations. About the wits, Wilson writes:

The name [of wit] was as loose as the morals of the assemblage. A wit was anyone from wild malicious Henry Killigrew or George Bridges (created a wit for hard drinking) to George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, the last splendid playboy of the fading Renaissance or William Wycherley, the finest dramatic genius of the Restoration court . . . . A wit was simply anyone who pretended to intellectuality.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Wilson, p. 5.

Certainly Wycherley could make a claim to intellectuality if anyone could. Under the stern tutelage of his humorless father, Daniel, he had gone through a rigorous training.<sup>53</sup> Under the gentle tutelage of the Marquise de Montausier he progressed admirably in French. He participated in the refined and stimulating talk of the Marquise and her friends among the Precieuses.<sup>54</sup> Montague Summers is undoubtedly correct in his assertion that "Wycherley could have received no better education than in the society of this fascinating and intellectual woman."<sup>55</sup> Probably he even came under the more sober, bracing influence of the Marquise's misanthropic husband, whose greatest pleasure was to seclude himself among his books in the library. By the standards of his age or of any age Wycherley would be considered a genuine wit. His reputation rested on his accomplishments and his merit and not on his position at court. His pride had nothing to gain by his either praising the sexual behavior of the court circle or by his damning it. The image of reality in his plays therefore most probably represents his honest view of the life he observed around him. It is not a fantasy; nor is it a deliberate affront on decency and morality. His art is clear sighted and, insofar as the word can be used to mean the attempt to find the general patterns governing diverse phenomena, it was objective.

If Wycherley seemed revolted by what he saw and represented in his art, it is not necessary to conclude that he was expressing puritanism or that he was exercising his artistic talents within an established satirical genre. The darkened tones of his last two plays can be accounted for partly by his own temperament. It is also true that the Restoration love ethos,

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<sup>53</sup>Summers, I, 11-12.    <sup>54</sup>Connely, p. 18.    <sup>55</sup>Summers, I, 14.

as outlined in the previous chapter, had implicit within it principles which might support a sober, pessimistic scrutiny of the excesses of the court circle and its admirers. Analysis of Wycherley's plays strongly indicates an increasing skepticism which rejects even the fashionable skepticism of the Restoration love ethos itself. By the time of The Plain Dealer this skepticism seems to have cut Wycherley loose from the philosophical ground of the Restoration love ethos but also from any logically tenable value system. The spirit of the Restoration love ethos partook of "l'esprit de sa generation." "L'esprit" surrounded and sustained the court life but was much broader. Sedley, Rochester and Charles were content to seek sexual ascendancy over the weak, to flout idealism, and to practice an erotic experimentalism. They responded to the call of anti-Platonism, Hobbesiansm and the new science in somewhat crude and obvious ways, disregarding its less apparent, deeper demands. In his plays, though perhaps not always in his life, Wycherley showed greater perspicacity and greater sensitivity than this.

### CHAPTER III

#### LOVE IN A WOOD

That Love in a Wood was composed in 1659 as Wycherley claimed seems unlikely.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Wycherley's memory had failed; perhaps he was boasting of his precocity; or perhaps he was in fact excusing the flaws of the play by pleading his youth. This last possibility is an intriguing one and does some credit to Wycherley's critical judgment. Probably, though, it is not the actual reason for Wycherley's claim. At any rate, whether he wrote the play in 1659, at nineteen or after the Great Fire of 1666, to which the play several times alludes,<sup>2</sup> it is obviously a young man's effort and at least in its bouyancy and tolerance toward the characters stands in sharp contrast to The Plain Dealer. Yet in the representation of love Wycherley exposes the outlines of certain themes and usages which are to recur in his plays. The choice of love intrigue as a main subject is strong evidence in favor of the 1666 date. "The whole spirit and action of the play is post-Restoration," says Montague Summers.<sup>3</sup> And he goes on, "Ranger, Vincent, Dapperwit, Sir Simon Addleplot, would have been impossible figures in Cromwell's London."<sup>4</sup> The Restoration is as a wall separating two worlds, and there is little question on which side of it Wycherley stood. In the tone, spirit, action and characterization of a significant part of the play

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<sup>1</sup>See Montague Summers, The Complete Works of William Wycherley, 4 vols. (London, 1924), I, 17 for the evidence against Wycherley's claim.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.    <sup>3</sup>Ibid.    <sup>4</sup>Ibid.

there is manifested those habits of thought and disposition one would expect to find among the partakers of the Restoration love ethos. Experience is placed above convention; idealism is called into question if not actively scorned; faith is replaced by skepticism. However, despite its dramatization of these typical trends, it must be made clear it remains distinctively Wycherley's play. It is not likely that it would be mistaken for an Etherege play, for instance, and not only because, unlike Etherege, "Wycherley reduced analogy to a minimum function."<sup>5</sup> Wycherley's hand is discernible in the skill with which he draws vivid characters and manipulates the play's semi-farcical complications while maintaining perspective on the sub-surface gravity of his themes. The gravity is, of course, only suggested, as subsequent analysis of the love themes should indicate. But its incipient presence betokens Wycherley's uniqueness, which I believe lies neither in his satirical approach to the follies encouraged by the Restoration love ethos nor in his uncritical acceptance of the freedoms permitted by it. His uniqueness seems to consist of a clear-eyed detachment, a willingness to examine things as they are, not as one wishes they were, in order to catch the exact nature of them. The skepticism bred of the collapse of the old idealism and the advances made by the new science moved post-Restoration men to affect a disdain of conventions, to ridicule marriage and spurn fidelity. Love itself became a subject of contemptuous amusement, as the poems of Rochester and Sedley, discussed in Chapter I, indicate. Wycherley partook of this disdain and contempt. In his life he seemed to have little regard for marriage and considerable skepticism toward the idea of lasting love. In a letter to John Dennis, he writes:

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<sup>5</sup>Norman N. Holland, The First Modern Comedies (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 38.



If you have been deprived of a mistress, consider you have lost a wife, and 'tho you are disappointed of a short satisfaction, you have likewise escaped a tedious vexation, which matrimony infallibly comes to be, one way or another; so that your misfortune is an accident which your true friends should rather felicitate than commiserate.<sup>6</sup>

In this he was "l' esprit de sa generation," and Love in a Wood reveals this side of him. But I believe that Wycherley extended the disdain of convention and the skepticism to those new conventions of the wits, that he was as contemptuous of their affectations and their unthinking acceptance of unnatural intrigue as they were of the old conventions of marriage and Platonic idealism. This side of Wycherley, undoubtedly strengthened by his ambiguous relationship to the court, also appears though not with great comic force, in Love in a Wood.

The play itself is double plotted. One plot is a "high" plot involving the fortunes of Valentine and Christina, young lovers, both of them pure and relatively naive. Valentine, who is given to extreme jealousy, has wounded a rival for Christina's affection and believing the wound to be mortal has fled the country. Stricken with grief over Valentine's plight, Christina retires from society, vowing never to re-enter it until his return. This situation is activated into a series of dramatic complications when Ranger, a rakish friend of Valentine's, pursues a beautiful woman from St. James Park. The woman happens to be Ranger's mistress, Lydia, who has gone to the park because she is suspicious of Ranger and wants to watch for him. Lydia seeks sanctuary in her friend Christina's house, persuading Christina to present herself as the woman from the Park in order to remove Ranger's conviction that it was Lydia. The result of

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<sup>6</sup>John Dennis "Letters of Friendship and Several Other Occasions" in The Works of Monsieur Voiture (London, 1705), p. 27.

Lydia's deception is that Ranger becomes smitten with Christina and fulsomely compliments her. Lydia becomes convinced there has been a love affair between Christina and Ranger despite Christina's protests at Ranger's overtures. Valentine, who has returned to England, has also followed Lydia from the Park, believing it is Christina. His friend Vincent attempts to assure him that he is mistaken: Christina has virtually been in mourning since his absence. But as in the case of the doubting Lydia, the truth cannot shake his jealous conviction. The remainder of this high plot consists of the unravelling of this situation so that in the end Christina's innocence is established in the eyes of Lydia and Valentine, and Ranger is persuaded that Christina really is immune to his overtures. Wycherley's device for bringing about the necessary revelations leading to the denouement is a letter which Lydia writes to Ranger in Christina's name. Convinced that Christina desires him, Ranger dispatches his friend Dapperwit to meet her and bring her to the house of Vincent, who happens to be his friend as well as Valentine's. Meantime Christina decides to seek Valentine at Vincent's. When Christina arrives at Vincent's, Valentine conceals himself and listens in outrage while Christina says she has come to meet her lover, whom she does not name. Soon after her arrival Ranger comes in and begins to lay claim to her affection, on the basis of her letter. Her denials of any interest in him incite him to the desperate extreme of boasting--largely for Vincent's benefit--that he has spent the night with her. Valentine becomes convinced of Christina's infidelity and Lydia, who has come to Vincent's just in time to witness Ranger and Christina together, becomes convinced of Ranger's. Lydia and Valentine leave Vincent's. Christina pursues Valentine, and Ranger, after being told by Vincent of Lydia's appearance, renounces intrigue and vows to seek

a reconciliation with Lydia. The final clarification of the facts for Valentine awaits a cleverly conceived scene in St. James Park when Christina, confused by the dark, mistakes Valentine for Ranger and demands that he retract his boast and restore Valentine's assurance of her chastity. At the same time, elsewhere in the Park, Ranger is with Lydia whom he mistakes for Christina. He accuses her of causing him to sacrifice Lydia's love in a vain pursuit of hers and in an access of indignation throws her down and threatens to rape her. The arrival of Vincent saves Lydia and clarifies reality for Ranger. Now it is only a matter of time and the forgiveness of Lydia before the two couples can be married in proper matches, Christina to Valentine, Lydia to Ranger.

The complications of the "low" plot are even more involved than are those of the high plot. The center of the plot is Mrs. Joyner, a match-maker who has been retained by the Widow Flippant and Sir Simon Addleplot, both of whom desire to marry in order to improve their fortunes. Sir Simon will settle for the widow Flippant but would prefer Martha, the young daughter of Alderman Gripe. Martha loves Dapperwit. This triangle is resolved in St. James Park on the very evening when the high plot is being brought to its conclusion. Sir Simon has been impersonating Jonas, a clerk who is supposedly the agent of a suitor. His plan is to remove his disguise at the appropriate time, present himself as the employer of Jonas, and claim Martha's hand. The plan backfires when Dapperwit arrives and he and Martha commence love making before "Jonas's" eyes. Martha will not be convinced even after Sir Simon removes his disguise and reappears in his own person that he is anybody but Jonas, and after some moments of suspense, she and Dapperwit are off to be married. It is the marriage of Dapperwit that affords Wycherley the mechanism for connecting

the high and low plot in the final scene of the play. Dapperwit is holding a wedding celebration at the Mulberry Garden in St. James Park and invites his friends Valentine, Vincent and Ranger to the feast. At the wedding of Dapperwit and Martha, Sir Simon decides to make the best of a bad situation and pays court to the widow Flippant.

The second strand of the low plot concerns Alderman Gripe's desire for Lucy Crossbite. Through the offices of Mrs. Joyner, Alderman Gripe is introduced to Lucy. Uncontrollably aroused by the young girl, he attempts to embrace her, whereupon the door opens, and the landlord and Crossbite burst into the room accusing Gripe of ravishing the innocent Lucy. Only a payment of £500 will satisfy Crossbite's demand for satisfaction and protect Gripe from a scandal which would destroy his reputation. Gripe pays the sum, and Mrs. Joyner promises him to make up for the loss by arranging an assignation with Lucy. The meeting is to take place in St. James Park, coincidentally, on the same evening that all the other characters are to be in the Park. The marriage of Martha and Dapperwit interferes with Joyner's somewhat confused plan, but in the end, before the entire group attending the wedding festivities, Gripe calls for a parson to unite him with Lucy, not because he loves her but to produce an heir that will cut off his daughter Martha and her husband Dapperwit from his fortune. This doubles the misfortune of Dapperwit at the hands of the Gripe family: Martha has already confessed to her father that she has married Dapperwit only to provide a father for a child she is carrying. Dapperwit feels precious little consolation from the fact that Lucy has been his mistress.

The two go-betweens in Love in a Wood, Mrs. Joyner and Vincent, embody two distinct motifs that recur in contrast to each other throughout the play.

The motif embodied by Mrs. Joyner is greed. The motif embodied by Vincent is charity. In the opening scene of the play, we find Wycherley careful to make Joyner's character unmistakably clear. We see Flippant and Joyner in the following dialogue:

Flip. Not a husband to be had for money. Come, Come, I might have been a better House-Wife for my selfe (as the World goes now,) if I had dealt for an Heir with his Guardian, Uncle, or Mother-in Law; and you are no better than a chouse, a Cheat.

Joyn. I a cheat, Madam.

Flip. I am out of my Money, and my Patience too.

Joyn. Do not run out of your patience whatever you do, 'Tis a necessary virtue for a Widow without a joynture in truly.

Flip. Vile woman, though my Fortune be something wasted, my Person's in good repair; If I had not depended on you, I had had a Husband before this time; When I gave you the last five pounds, did not you promise I should be married by Christmas.<sup>7</sup>

For Flippant and Joyner the making of a match is a mere business transaction. As the broker, Joyner occupies the center of the relationship between greed and marriage, and her own greed provides the impulse to keep the mechanism of the transaction functioning. Though Wycherley makes it clear that Joyner has no other object than the making of money, he does not use this fact invidiously but rather refuses to depict her as worse than her clients. The Widow Flippant vehemently denounces marriage, as a means of dissembling her desire for it. Her reasoning proceeds from the conviction that behind any love interest there can be only base motives, either lust or greed, and since men no longer find her body desirable, it is evident they are after her money, which she must use shrewdly, as a trap:

Joyn. If no body were wiser than I, I should think, since the Widow wants the natural alurement which the Virgin has, you ought to give men all other incouragements in truly.

Flip. Therefore, on the contrary, because the Widows Fortune (whether suppos'd or real) is her chiefest Bait, the more chary she seems of it, and the more she withdraws it, the more eagerly the busie gaping frye will bite: With us Widows Husbands are got like Bishopricks,

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

by saying no; and I tell you, a young Heir is as shie of a Widow, as of a Rook, to my knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

For Flippant the world is run on Hobbesian principles. Men are the victims of their own impulses either of acquisitiveness or of survival. She and Joyner agree perfectly on the system that operates in the relations between the sexes, but Joyner is more adept at using the system. That Flippant is at the mercy of Joyner's shrewdness becomes clear when Wycherley has Flippant disclose the true state of her fortune:

Flip. No, no, my mischance (as you call it) is greater than that; I have but three months to reckon, e're I lye down with my Post and Equipage; and must be delivered of a Woman, a Foot-Man and a Coach-Man. For my coach must down, unless I can get Sir Simon to draw with me.<sup>9</sup>

Flippant's financial difficulties are extreme; her declamations against marriage are only a strategy to attract Sir Simon, who is himself hoping to achieve a fortune either by marrying Martha or the Widow Flippant herself. Joyner, who has her fingers in all the strings by which the seekers of fortune move responds to Flippant's speech in an aside which discloses to the audience through a three level irony the prospects for a mutually satisfactory transaction between Flippant and Sir Simon:

Joyn. He will payre with you exactly if you knew all.<sup>10</sup>

On one level, the word "payre" denotes sexual coupling or perhaps marriage. If Flippant and Sir Simon were in love, such a denotation would constitute a coarse but innocent joke reminding us of the ultimate mundanity of a pseudo-dignified middle aged romance. But at a second level, the word "Payre" refers to the wish of Flippant that Sir Simon will "draw with me." They will be paired as a team of horses is paired to draw the fine coach of Flippant. Now the motive for marriage is not quite as acceptable as in

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 74.    <sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 74-75.    <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

the first level of meaning, but still within the realm of a forgivable human desire to maintain comfort by pooling money and effort. At a third level, however, Mrs. Joyner's statement refers to the similarity of Sir Simon's condition to Flippant's: His impecunity equals hers. In the sense that they are both seeking money in marriage, through fraud and deceit, they pair exactly. This meaning reminds us that in this transactional arrangement, love is the last motive behind the human relationship that presumably is built on love.

Besides having Mrs. Joyner both assist and comment on the strategies of Flippant, Wycherley has her assume a manipulative role in the Gripe-Lucy affair. Her engineering of the events that result in Gripe's embarrassment clearly places her before the audience as an embodiment of the vice of greed making its way in the world by means of love intrigue. But a new dimension is added to Joyner's significance. In accepting money from Gripe, as a panderer would, she is using his lust to gratify the greed of herself and of Crossbite. In bringing about Gripe's discovery and the resulting extortion she is using his hypocrisy to gratify her greed. As the informer she is doubly treacherous because she has thwarted the enjoyment she was to guarantee as the panderer. Gripe reminds her of her treachery in the opening scene of Act IV:

Gripe. Graceless, Perfidious Woman, what mak'st thou here? Art thou not afraid to be us'd like an Informer, since Thou has made me pay thee for betraying me?

Joyn. Betray your Worship, what do you mean? I an informer, I scorn your words.

Gripe. Woman, I say again, thou art as Treacherous as an Informer, and more unreasonable; for he lets us have something for our money, before he distrubs us.<sup>11</sup>

The mockery in Joyner's response to Gripe emanates from her cynicism and

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

contempt toward her clients. Gripe's intelligence is obviously no match for hers, and she know it. But more importantly, Gripe is unable even to perceive the incommensurability of his age and condition with his lust. Like Flippant he seeks to attain love by means of something other than love. But unlike Flippant he seems oblivious to the cruel truth which necessitates his strategy, the truth that he is unlovable. Joyner's scorn of Gripe is carried through into her deliberate misunderstanding of his accusation:

Joyner. Your money, I'me Sure, was laid out faithfully; and I went away because I would not disturb you.<sup>12</sup>

But Gripe persists in his conviction that she was behind the entrance of the landlord and Crossbite and a benefactor of their extortion of money from him:

Gripe. I had not grudg'd you the money I gave you, but the five hundred pound; the five hundred pound, inconstionable, false woman; the five hundred pound; you cheated, trappan'd, rob'd me of the five hundred pound.<sup>13</sup>

This speech dramatizes the folly of Gripe, who finds it morally acceptable to pay Joyner to serve as a panderer for his absurd lust but "inconstionable" for her to exploit the situation for added profit. Gripe will accept the Hobbesian premise that power and the impulses rule so long as it does not extend beyond his own power to purchase what he desires. For him love is a purchasable commodity. In his system of values, money is the token of power, but it is also the guarantee of respectability. Wanting both love and respectability, Gripe uses money to enlist the skills of Joyner and to silence the landlord and Crossbite. Being stupid, he fails to recognize that given the power of money to purchase love as well as the power to buy

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.    <sup>13</sup>Ibid.



respectability, which can be a part of the desirability sometimes mistaken for love, few men or women will be able to resist the allure of gold. Thus it is ludicrously contradictory for him to moralize against Joyner's greed, when his own lust and sham respectability are supported by the object of greed, money, which he worships. The system of morality which provides the premise for Gripe's action operates against him not only directly through Joyner's desire for money but also through the desire of Crossbite for the respectability that money can buy. When the landlord and Crossbite are debating whether to kill Gripe or to allow him to buy his freedom, and their silence, with five hundred pounds, Gripe laments his fate in language reminiscent of the Old Testament:

Gripe. My Enemies are many, and I shall be a scandal to the Faithful, as a laughing-stock to the wicked; Go, prepare your Engines for my Persecution; I'll give you the best security I can.<sup>14</sup>

The landlord cooperates with Gripe's demand for this sacriligious martyrdom by directing him toward the next room where "The instruments are drawing."<sup>15</sup> But Crossbite reconsiders; he senses that Gripe's fear of death exceeds the miserliness which he is dissembling beneath his expression of self-righteousness:

Cross. Indeed, now I consider; a Portion will do my Daughter more good than his death; that would but publish her shame; money will cover it; probatum est, as they say--let me tell you, Sir, 'tis a charitable thing to give a young Maid a Portion.<sup>16</sup>

Crossbite implicitly accepts the moral system under which Gripe lives and does only what is logical under the system. If the news of illicit love brings a scandal, then money can stop the news from being disseminated and thereby preserve respectability. And respectability, which in Crossbite's mind resides in money, inspires love, for it is the maid's Portion that is

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 115.    <sup>15</sup>Ibid.    <sup>16</sup>Ibid.

the object of her suitor's affection, at least in the world of the Crossbites.

Among the clients of Mrs. Joyner, love is neither erotic nor romantic. For Flippant it is a complicated transaction with men whose cupidity and shrewdness tax all her arts of dissimulation and pretense. Intent only on getting the better of the deal, Flippant is devoid of passion, even of the remembrance of passion. For Gripe, love is a sordid but implacable instinct which must be indulged clandestinely and concealed at all costs. For him as for Flippant the connection of love and money is absolute. Both of them require money to purchase the respectability which is so dear to them. Flippant will use money to lure money and thereby maintain her respectability. Gripe will use money to forestall scandal. For both, respectability consists of mere outward show and reputation. Both are hypocrites, yet curiously both are naive, because both seem incapable of anticipating the treachery that will be done them by their intended victims, who are as accomplished at the game as they are. Through Joyner's cynicism and mockery we are able to ascertain that Gripe and Flippant are without the depth necessary to perceive the consequences of the premises under which they live and without enough spontaneity to relish the erotic and the comic possibilities inherent in their type of love. Wycherley clearly demonstrates the unacceptability of love as a transaction and love as a clandestine pleasure.

In the case of the low plot, the go-between, Joyner, seems intended to represent an agent of the convention of marriage, since she is primarily a matchmaker. Considering her function as broker and panderer, it seems safe to conclude that Wycherley is making a satiric comment on the love represented in the intrigues of Flippant and Gripe. Flippant's kind of

love, without passion or erotic interest, and Gripe's kind of love, which is mere sordid lust, are equally inhuman and without real value, regardless of the efforts to render them respectable and regardless of the legitimating of them through marriage. But it must not be thought that Wycherley is satirizing marriage, or romance or any of the old values called into question by the new Restoration values. He is satirizing the futility and baseness of the use of love as a disguise for greed and lust. It happens, of course, that in the end Gripe does get Lucy as his wife and Flippant does move closer to a marriage with Sir Simon, but the possibility of these marriages only strengthens Wycherley's satire against vices. It does not direct it toward the institution of marriage. Gripe will marry Lucy only to deprive Dapperwit of Martha's fortune. Lucy, of course, will marry him to get his fortune. Sir Simon will marry Flippant for her money, and money is the motive behind Flippant's consent to consider marriage to Sir Simon. Having its place in the same code of greed and hypocrisy, under which love is a meaningless word to lend a semblance of dignity to rapacity, marriage becomes a travesty of what it should be. Gripe and Lucy deserve one another, as do Simon and Flippant. Marriage will only culminate their perversion of love and perhaps begin their punishment for it.

It seems clear that in the low plot of Love in a Wood the go-between is a device by which the playwright is able to expose the relations among characters and to delineate their motives through the understanding they have reached with the go-between. But the function of go-between is not attacked for being inherently evil, nor, in the case of Mrs. Joyner, does it become the object of satire. Wycherley is not concerned with criticising the profession of Mrs. Joyner, and in this he reveals even in this

early play a disciplined detachment. When we turn to the high plot we find the go-between Vincent presented as an almost saintly character. The relationship between Vincent and the characters he assists is in marked contrast to the relationship of Joyner to her clients, and through this contrast Wycherley is able to present a number of differences in the way love is represented in the high plot as opposed to the low plot. Vincent, unlike Joyner, performs his services voluntarily; he does not charge. He is himself not a party to the intrigues and has no monetary or sexual stake in them. His motives are unselfish and disinterested. Whereas Joyner is profoundly cynical about the motives of her clients Vincent is almost touchingly ready to believe the best about Valentine and Christina. When we first meet Vincent he is with Ranger and Dapperwit and stands in contrast to them for his decency and sobriety. His function as go-between is established when he is called from the restaurant in which the three young men are drinking to the street below. He returns to tell Ranger: "There is a Woman below in a coach wou'd speak with you."<sup>17</sup> No sooner has Ranger left than Dapperwit begins backbiting him. Vincent defends the absent victim:

Dap. This Ranger, Mr. Vincent, is as false to his friend as his Wench.

Vin. You have no reason to say so, but because he is absent.

Dap. 'Tis disobliging to tell a Man of his faults to his Face, if he had but your grave parts and manly wit, I shou'd adore him; but a pox he is a meer Buffon, a Jack-pudding let me perish.<sup>18</sup>

Vincent proves impervious to flattery and prefers decency to a compliment at Ranger's expense:

Vin. You are an ungrateful fellow, I had heard him maintain you had wit, which is more than e're you could do for yourself; I thought you had owne'd him your Maecenas!<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 80.    <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 81.    <sup>19</sup>Ibid.

In this little scene Wycherley has taken pains to establish the virtuous character of Vincent which will serve as the standard against which we are to measure the love affairs of Christina and Valentine, and Lydia and Ranger.

Once it has been established that Vincent is a person of sterling character, it cannot be doubted that his cooperation with Valentine and Ranger results from noble impulses. This implication of nobility extends to the love between the four principal characters of the high plot, for the furtherance of which Vincent assumes the role of go-between, though not all of the four characters partake equally of the nobility. Wycherley has arranged them in descending order from Christina to Valentine to Lydia to Ranger. The complex functions of Vincent in the center of the love affairs involving these characters are evident in the scene in Act II in which Valentine arrives at Vincent's lodging just returned from his brief flight to France to escape the vengeance of the relatives of Clerimont, whom he has wounded in a duel over Christina. Upon seeing his friend, Vincent remarks that he is surprised Valentine would return without knowing that Clerimont was out of danger. Valentine replies:

I fear'd my Mistress, not my Life, my Life I could trust again  
with my old enemy, Fortune; but no longer, my Mistress, in the  
hands of my greater Enemies, her Relations.<sup>20</sup>

The dialogue that follows exposes the character of Valentine while setting forth unmistakably the role Vincent is to play in his friend's love affair.

Val. Prithee leave thy fooling, and tell me, if since my departure,  
She has given evidences of her love, to Clear those doubts I went  
away with, for as absence is the bane of common and bastard Love;  
'Tis the vindication of that, which is true and generous.

Vin. Nay, if you cou'd ever doubt her Love, you deserve to doubt on;  
for there is no punishment great enough for jealousy, but jealousy.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 100.    <sup>21</sup>Ibid.

Vincent perceives that Valentine is a man of passion whose tempestuousness needs to be brought under control. The impulsiveness of his return, the very fact of his having fought a duel, his distrust of Fortune and of other people all mark him as a rash and intemperate man. His love for Christina is intense and compounded with jealousy. Indeed, the audience may well wonder whether jealousy is not the motive force behind the intensity. Vincent's admonition against Valentine's unthinking return demonstrates his realistic nature. But he is not a mere pragmatist, for his warning against jealousy and his assurance of Christina's loyalty show a penetration and wisdom gained by something other than pure practical experience. He must be contrasted to Joyner, who is also wise to the ways of deceit and chicanery. He possesses an equal perceptiveness into human motives but he is not without faith in love and idealism. Thus he is not cynical. His tone in admonishing Valentine resembles that of a kindly older brother who would instruct gently. Despite Valentine's crude suspicion, his simple-minded categorization of love into "Bastard love" and "true and generous" love, and his foolish jealousy, Vincent remains patient and rational. Neither he nor Valentine live by the Restoration love ethos. Valentine is too passionate, takes love too personally and because of his jealousy forfeits the detachment which would characterize the sensuality of the rake. Furthermore, his loyalty and willingness to risk life and safety for his beloved set him apart as a romantic. He stands in contrast to Gripe who though equally passionate will take no risks, because he worships respectability more than he desires love. Thus, despite his irrational nature, Valentine is worthy of Vincent's friendship, for his impulses, though not entirely pure are not hypocritical and sterile. If he is jealous, it is he who will suffer, as subsequent action makes clear.

Vincent not only falls outside the Restoration code but embodies a contrary ideal, one in which reason is not subservient to vice but acts to temper and contain vice and to mediate between passion and reality and also between passion and ideals. The character of Valentine increases the delicacy of Vincent's role, for it is Valentine's suspicious nature that refuses to accept the attestation of Christina's fidelity in the face of Ranger's claim to have followed her. As the go-between for Christina and Valentine, Vincent upholds unseen truth against the evidence of the senses and becomes an antithesis to the cynicism of Joyner. When Ranger enters excitedly, boasting of his acquaintance with the beautiful girl who happens to be Christina, Vincent merely comments, "It cannot be," and he advises Ranger that if he has indeed seen Christina, he would be unwise not to desist seeing her, because

'tis not fairly done to Rival your Friend Valentine in his absence;  
and when he is present, you know 'twill be dangerous, by my Lord  
Clerimont's example . . . ."22

Ranger spurns the combination of prudence and morality professed by his friend and departs determined to court Christina. Valentine, who has witnessed the exchange between Vincent and Ranger, is convinced of Christina's guilt:

Val. Here's your Penelope, the woman that had not seen the Sun, nor face of Man, since my departure; for it seems she goes out in the night, when the Sun is absent, and faces are not distinguish'd.<sup>23</sup>

Vincent remains unshakable in his conviction of Christina's loyalty, and being astutely aware of human nature, prefers to believe that Ranger is either lying or mistaken than that Christina is guilty:

Vin. He spares not the Innocents in Bibs and Aprons . . . he has made some gross mistake concerning Christina, which tomorrow will

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 102.    <sup>23</sup>Ibid.

discover; in the mean time let us go to sleep.<sup>24</sup>

Valentine remains disturbed and agitated. He closes the act with a speech reaffirming his intent to indulge his doubts and remain disordered:

Val. I will not hinder you, because I cannot enjoy it myself;  
Hunger, Revenge, to Sleep are pretty Foes, But only Death the  
jealous Eyes can close.<sup>25</sup>

Like Mrs. Joyner, Vincent performs some important functions as go-between. One of these, which we have already considered, is that of appeaser; another is that of advocate. In these functions, we see the vast difference in motivation and consequence between Vincent and his counterpart. Besides the differences between Vincent and Mrs. Joyner, there exist interesting distinctions in the relation of each of them to the principal characters of their respective plots. Through these distinctions, Wycherley is able to offer still more comment on the opposition between the types of love represented in each plot. The difference between Mrs. Joyner and her clients is that she carries the code of selfishness to its logical extreme and assumes that everyone is at least as conniving as she is. She survives by being able to play her unscrupulous clients against each other. Because of her profound cynicism, she does not confuse, either through self-delusion or intent, her greed with love. Because she is herself uninvolved as a lover, she is able to use the pretense of love among her clients to accumulate more money. Though she is rapacious she is not foolish, as are Gripe and Flippant, and this difference enables us to infer Wycherley's opinion of the love affairs of these two characters, both of whom are considerably less attractive than Mrs. Joyner. Clearly, their love affairs are to be judged as more vicious than the greed of Mrs. Joyner which depends

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.    <sup>25</sup>Ibid.



upon them, for without their folly and vice there would be no need for her cunning. Like Mrs. Joyner, Vincent is also himself not a principal in a love affair. Like her he exhibits considerably more intelligence than those he assists. But since his motives are unimpeachable and his interest in the affairs of his friends proceeds from affection and charity, we are forced to acknowledge that in the love affairs of the high plot and, more significantly, in the characters of each of the four lovers, there exists something noble. The innocence of Vincent, his incapacity for suspicion and recrimination befits the genuineness of Valentine's passion and the purity of Christina's devotion. It also deflates the egocentric presumptuousness of Ranger while simultaneously advancing the plot toward its conclusion. Vincent's importance in these ways is especially evident in the scene in Act IV when Ranger appropriates Vincent's house for a meeting with his female correspondent, whom he believes to be Christina. When Ranger produces the letter, Valentine, who is concealed, immediately accepts its authenticity.

Val. A Letter from her.<sup>26</sup>

The contrast between Valentine and Vincent is pointedly made by Vincent's response to the fact of the letter, which differs significantly from Valentine's..

Vin. A letter from Christina; Ha, ha, ha.<sup>27</sup>

As the dialogue continues, Vincent remains unconvinced by Ranger's assertions that Christina has sent the letter:

Vin. I must confess, I have none of the little letters, half name, or title, like your Spanish Epistles Dedicatory; but that a man so frequent in honourable Intrigues, as you are, should not know the summons of an imprudent Common Woman, from that of a person of Honour.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 128.    <sup>27</sup>Ibid.

Ran. Christina is so much a Person of Honour, she'll own what she has writ, when she comes.

Vin. But will she come hither indeed?

Ran. Immediately, you'll excuse my liberty with you; I cou'd not conceal such happiness, from such a Friend as you, lest you shou'd have taken it unkindly.

Vin. Faith, you have oblig'd me indeed; for you, and others wou'd often have made me believe your honorable Intrigues, but never did me the Honour to convince me of 'em before.<sup>28</sup>

This exchange is absolutely essential to the plot, of course, because it establishes the acquiescence of Vincent in the appropriation of his lodgings. The character of Vincent is represented from a new angle, for in the remarks of Ranger, we see that despite his fineness of character Vincent is not a prude. He is familiar with the conventions of intrigue, and this fact about him lends greater authority to both his skepticism toward Ranger and his tolerance of Valentine. He is not moved by puritanical horror to compulsively deny Ranger's boasts, and he is not moved by blind credulousness to persist in his faith in Christina. He judges the two love affairs from the standpoint of a man of the world, and he makes a discrimination between the affair of Ranger and the affair of Valentine. He agrees to cooperate with Ranger, because his conviction that Ranger is mistaken can only be confirmed by permitting Ranger to complete his design. His ultimate purpose is not only to discover the truth for his own satisfaction but to once and for all clear the name of Christina in Valentine's mind, so that Valentine can purge himself of jealousy. A simple drive, faith in Christina, lies behind his relations to both his friends, and the quality of love in each of the lovers can be viewed in proportion to the degree of genuine concern Vincent invests in their plights. Christina's love is obviously the highest, Valentine's the next, Lydia's the next, and Ranger's,

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

in which Vincent makes no willing investment except to debunk and obstruct it, the least.

Through the functions of the go-between in both the low plot and the high plot Wycherley represents a number of different versions of love. In the Flippant-Addleplot strand of the low plot, love is represented as a pretext for what is essentially a financial transaction. In the Gripe-Lucy strand of the low plot, love is seen as an embarrassing physical need. In the high plot, there is love as an egoistic game; this is the love of Ranger, which reflects the typical Restoration love chase. There is also love as a romantic fixation. This is the love of Valentine. There is the love of Lydia, a nervous possessiveness, and there is the love of Christina, a truly selfless and steady devotion. These types of love are all within the range of sexual relations. Apart from all of them, of course, are the two non-sexual extremes of love, the inhuman and the near angelic. Joyner's love of money is obsessive, and so unrelenting as to be inhuman. Vincent's love of his friends, of truth, reason and prudence are so distinct from the loves of the other characters as to qualify for exclusion from the category of ordinary human love. The love affairs of the low plot in which Joyner plays the go-between are permissible forms of conduct within the Restoration love ethos, for both affairs are conducted primarily for gain. Since both affairs result in marriage, and both proceed by means of intrigue, it can be said that both adhere to the traditionally accepted conventions as well as the more recent conventions of the court. Thus, if Wycherley rejects these forms of love, as seems to be the case, it is not because they fail to follow the letter of the contemporary code he presumably accepted. Nor is it because they insist on unconventionality. It is primarily because they are not based upon a desire to devote oneself to another, a desire that

in the sexual sphere is represented by Christina and in the broader sphere of human relations is represented by Vincent.

That Wycherley was interested in representing various types of love and of indicating the relative values of these loves seems clear enough. In his employment of other devices besides the go-between, we find him undertaking a thorough dissection and arrangement of these types of love and by the difference in his manner of treating these devices, unmistakably communicating his judgments of them to his audience.

Anyone seeking a superficial unity in Love in a Wood can find one in the balances and parallels between the low plot and the high plot. Besides the presence of a go-between in both plots, possibly the most important parallel consists in the fact that both plots employ the device of disguise as a means of creating plot complications. In the low plot, the obvious example of disguise is Sir Simon Addleplot. The disguise of Sir Simon is, in reality, a double one. He is disguised as Jonas the clerk and as such is employed by Gripe. His purpose in assuming this disguise is to be near Martha. While acting as Jonas he presents himself to Martha as a representative of Sir Simon, a knight. This double dissimulation is an index into Sir Simon's character which is fully revealed in his employment of Mrs. Joyner in a dual assignment. He has employed Mrs. Joyner to arrange a marriage with either Flippant or Martha. The shrewd Joyner, who speaks for the wisdom of the street warns him against undue complicatedness in his affairs:

Joyn. But I am afraid this double plot of yours' should fail, you wou'd sooner succeed, if you only design'd upon Mrs. Martha, or only design'd upon Mrs. Martha, or only upon my Lady Flippant.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

But Sir Simon remains obdurate.

Sir Sim. May then you are no Woman of Intrigue, faith and troth 'tis good to have two strings to one Bow; if Mrs. Martha be coy; I tell the Widow I put on my disguise for her; But if Mrs. Martha be kind to Jonas, Sir Simon Addleplot will be false to the Widow, which is no more than Widows are us'd to; for a Promise to a Widow is as seldome kept as a Vow made at Sea, as Dapperwit says.<sup>30</sup>

Clearly, Sir Simon engages in intrigue unnecessarily, and as a disciple of Dapperwit relishes the notion of playing a double role and gaining his ends by stratagems. Of course, he does not know that Joyner is also an agent for Flippant, who is at least as accomplished a predator as he, and perhaps more desperate. Nor does he know that Martha is enamored of Dapperwit. In the next exchange between Joyner and Sir Simon, Wycherley has some fun with Sir Simon's confusion of love with love intrigue:

Joyn. I am afraid they should discover you.

Sir Sim. You have nothing to fear, you have your twenty Guineys in your pocket for helping me into my service, and if I get into Mrs. Martha's quarters, you have a hundred more, if into the Widows, fifty, happy goe lucky will her Ladship be at your house at the hour.

Joyn. Yes.

Sir Sim. Then you shall see when I am Sir Simon Addleplot, and my self, I'll look like my self, now I am Jonas. I look like an ass; you never thought Sir Simon cou'd have look'd so like an ass by his ingenuity.<sup>31</sup>

Not only does Wycherley make Sir Simon appear to enjoy being cozened by Joyner, he shows what a truly addled plot the simpleton has gotten himself entangled in. The absurdity of Sir Simon's plot becomes clear when he approaches Martha as Sir Simon and she refuses to believe he is anyone but Jonas. Indeed as Jonas he does look like an ass, but he looks like an ass as Sir Simon too. He is an ass in both roles because his sterile ingenuity prefers complicatedness to simplicity and intrigue to directness. Wycherley punishes Sir Simon for this perversity by depriving him of Martha, and he

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.    <sup>31</sup>Ibid.

adds insult to injury when he has Flippan show only minimal interest in marriage after Sir Simon eagerly responds to the apparent relaxation of her resistance in the face of her brother Gripe's marriage:

Flip. Nay, if my Brother come to marrying once, I may too; I swore I wou'd, when he did, little thinking--

Sir Sim. I take you at your word, Madam.

Flip. Well, but if I had thought you wou'd have been so quick with me--.<sup>32</sup>

It is apparent that for Sir Simon, disguise constitutes an outward device at the service of his inward perversity and essential falseness of purpose. Sir Simon is, of course, confused, and his fundamental confusion consists of an inability to distinguish love from love intrigue. It is fitting that Martha mocks him when he appears as himself. She knows he is not really Jonas, but persists in the falsehood to amuse herself and Dapperwit at his expense. Martha's persistent pretense exposes the contrast between her own deceptiveness and his. Hers is carried on in the service of a genuine, if misplaced, feeling for Dapperwit. Martha's treatment of Addleplot and the irony of Addleplot's failure result from Wycherley's employment of disguise to carry on his condemnation of the sterile and meaningless love based on greed and devoid of erotic passions or romantic sentiments.

Wycherley's intention to express a moral judgment on various types of love by using different applications of the same dramatic device becomes plain when one considers the functions and effects of concealment of identity in the high plot. The two female lovers in the high plot, Lydia and Christina, both conceal their identities. Lydia does it when she writes the letter to Ranger and signs it in Christina's name. Christina conceals her identity beneath a vizard mask when she goes to Vincent's house seeking

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

Valentine. The two deceptions produce converging effects, for, coincidentally, Ranger is at Vincent's, letter in hand, awaiting the arrival of the writer, when Christina enters. Christina's denials of acquaintance with Ranger are met with disbelief from Vincent and dismay from Ranger:

Vin. Do you not know him Madam? I thought you had come hither on purpose to meet him.

Chris. To Meet him!

Vin. By your own appointment.

Chris. What strange infatuation do's delude you all? You know he said he did not know me.

Vin. You writ to him, he has your letter.

Chris. Then you know my name sure? Yet you confess'd by now, you knew me not.

Ran. I must confess your anger has disguis'd you more than your mask; for I thought to have met a kinder Christina here.

Chris. Heavens! how cou'd he know me in this place? he watch'd me hither sure; or is there any other of my name, that you may no longer mistake me, for your Christina? I'll pull off that which soothes your error. (Pulls off her mask.)<sup>33</sup>

In several important ways this scene differs from the comparable scene in the low plot in which Sir Simon undisguises himself. First, the adoption of disguise, both in Lydia's letter and Christina's mask has been done under differing motivations. These women are not interested in deception and intrigue for their own sakes, but use them in the interest of true love. The wisdom and the virtue of their use of disguise are underscored by the fact that in the end each of them wins the man of her choice. Furthermore, the encounters of Ranger with the benign deception of Lydia and Christina definitely promote his resolution to abandon intrigue and to cultivate his romance with Lydia. Thus, in the high plot disguise serves a reforming function. Another important difference can be seen in the effect of the removal of disguise. Sir Simon's removal of it fails to win Martha to him, though obviously she knows he is not really Jonas. She

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 131-32.

turns his use of disguise against him. Christina's removal of it confirms Ranger in his conviction that he knows her, but his conviction fails to persuade Christina that she is acquainted with him. The audience is aware that Christina has met him once, at the time she concealed Lydia and met him at her own door. The disagreement between Martha and Sir Simon is as pointless as the disguise Sir Simon discards. The disagreement between Christina and Ranger is not pointless. Christina really does not know him, for in her concentration on Valentine, she is virtually oblivious of other men; hence she forgets that she has ever laid eyes on Ranger. This contrast in the effect of the removal of disguise reinforces the difference of motivation and intent that Wycherley is attempting to dramatize.

A further difference lies in the extent to which intrigue and betrayal pervade the low plot. When Sir Simon removes his disguise, he foolishly depends on Dapperwit to support his claim to be a knight rather than a clerk. But the deception of Sir Simon is, of course, more than equalled by the deception of Dapperwit himself, and the schemer becomes out-schemed, much to the delight of his persecutors and the audience. In the high plot, it is clear that a limit exists both on the amount of treachery practiced and on the extent of the influence of mendacity and distrust, and it is Vincent who presents the unimpeachable testimony that settles the dispute between the chagrined Christina and the vexed Ranger. Finally, it is important that the scene in the high plot involves a double disguise, but as Christina unconsciously implies, it is not the external devices that are delusive but a "strange infatuation." Unlike the characters of the low plot who engage in intrigue because they are unacquainted with the feelings of love, the characters of the high plot move from the promptings of their feelings. Christina is unknowingly alluding to the feelings of



Ranger for her. They are indeed a "strange infatuation," for there is nothing behind them but error and they persist in the face of Christina's reputation as a faithful mistress of Valentine. Ranger must be convinced that the love of Lydia promises more happiness than does a vain pursuit of a delusion grounded in infatuation, which once again attests the reforming function of disguise and concealment in the high plot.

In his use of mistaken identity as in his use of disguise and concealment Wycherley is exposing important differences between the high plot and the low plot and through these differences offering a basis for judging the relative worth of the love represented in each plot. It is significant that in the low plot, mistaken identity as such does not occur. Never does anyone mistake one character for another. But more than once the nature of someone's character is mistaken. This kind of situation allows Wycherley to develop a number of comic disclosures such as the disclosure near the play's conclusion that Martha is six months pregnant. In a scene in Act IV employing both disguise and comic disclosure, we find Sir Simon, disguised as Jonas, being jogged by Flippant, whom he warns not to be a bother. Her persistence elicits severe threats from him:

Sir Sim. . . . I vow and swear if you pass this Creviss, I'll kiss you in plain English.<sup>34</sup>

But the old harridan is without fear:

Flip. I wou'd I cou'd see that, do you defie me?  
[Steps to him. He kisses her] <sup>35</sup>

Sir Simon makes an initial discovery:

Sir Sim. How's this? I vow and swear, she kisses as tamely as Mrs. Ticklish, and with her mouth open too.<sup>36</sup>

The comic contest between the two intensifies until, challenged by Simon's

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 121.    <sup>35</sup>Ibid.    <sup>36</sup>Ibid.

threat to do more than just kiss her, Flippant throws down his ink and runs into the next room, the knight in hot pursuit. A few moments later, he meets Joyner; he is indignant at having discovered the true nature of Flippant, but grateful to be saved from such an evil person. He is appalled that when he threw her on the bed "all that he could do to her would not make her squeek."<sup>37</sup> Wycherley uses this scene not only to dramatize the revelation of Flippant's true character to Sir Simon, which had hitherto been concealed from him, but also to reveal to the audience the priggishness and hypocrisy of Sir Simon himself. Ironically, this is the only episode in the relationship of Simon and Flippant in which any spontaneous sexuality occurs. The important fact about this scene is precisely that Sir Simon is not mistaken about Flippant's identity, though, as he discovers, he has been gravely mistaken about her character. In the high plot there is a scene somewhat resembling this one. The high plot scene is the one in Act V in which Ranger, who has been drawn aside by Lydia in the Park, mistakes her for Christina. Ranger berates "Christina" for misusing him and laments the earlier mistaken identity that led him to her when he was actually following Lydia:

Ran. . . now you bid me follow you; and yet will have nothing to say to me; and I am more deceived this day and night, than I was last night; when, I must confess, I followed you for another--

Lyd. I'm glad to hear that. [Aside.]

Ran. One that wou'd have us'd me better; whose love, I have ungratefully abus'd for yours; yet from no other reason, but my natural inconstancy--Poor Lydia, Lydia--<sup>38</sup>

In a growing fury at Lydia's stubborn silence and at his own sense of frustration, Ranger, like Sir Simon, offers to throw down the woman who torments him, but unlike Flippant, Lydia squeeks.<sup>39</sup> Her resistance

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 122.    <sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 145.    <sup>39</sup>Ibid.

enables Ranger to discover her true identity and they are reconciled to each other. In this scene, Ranger mistakes Lydia's identity, but he does not mistake her character, and her protest against his attempted assault confirms that she is moved by purer motives than is Flippant. Of course, this scene lacks the comedy of the low plot scene, but through it, Ranger exposes himself to the audience as a man confused and perhaps prone to rashness but genuinely fond of Lydia and sincerely remorseful for his inconstancy. In his scene Sir Simon exhibits his basic dishonesty with himself, whereas in his scene Ranger exhibits his basic honesty. In these two scenes mistaken identity has been used as a device through which the playwright has been able to facilitate his revelation of character, but it is also a means of reflecting upon the distinction between mistaking who a person is and mistaking what a person is. Sir Simon knows who Lady Flippant is, but he must discover what she is. Furthermore, Sir Simon is obviously not aware of what he is, though he thinks he knows who he is. Ranger, in contrast, has learned to his shame what he is. This scene in the high plot is complemented, of course, by the scene in which Christina addresses Valentine whom she mistakes for Ranger. Once again, the act of discovering the true identity of the person addressed leads to discoveries on both sides that will be beneficial to the future relationship of the lovers. After professing her innocence and accusing Valentine (whom she takes for Ranger) of destroying the bond between her and Valentine, Christina charges:

Chris. Your silence is a confession of your guilt.<sup>40</sup>

The discoveries come quickly in the ensuing dialogue.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

Val. I own it.

Chris. But that will not serve my turn; for strait you must go clear your self and me, to him you have injur'd in me; if he has not made too much haste from me, to be found again; you must, I say, for he is a man that will have satisfaction; and in satisfying him, you do me.

Val. Then he is satisfy'd.

Chris. How! is it you? Then I am not satisfy'd.

Val. Will you be worse than your word?

Chris. I gave it not to you.

Val. Come dear Christina, the Jealous, like the Drunkard, has his punishment with his offense.<sup>41</sup>

Valentine has discovered that he has been a jealous fool. For Christina there is also a discovery. In her reluctance to forgive Valentine she discovers in herself an inability to rise above her injury. Eventually, of course, she can forgive and forget, but being a woman and not a saint, at this moment she remains in umbrage. In these high plot instances of mistaken identity Wycherley seems interested in exposing a soundness and honesty in the characters of his lovers, which is revealed during the process of discovering true identity. Thus the emergence of the true identity coincides with the discovery of the true character, which in the case of each of the four young lovers is a character suited to a permanent and satisfying love relationship. In contrast, the characters of the low plot, though unconfused about superficial appearances remain confused about important matters such as their own folly and hypocrisy. For Wycherley, then, it seems that true love requires not only feeling but feeling expressed honestly and feeling unpolluted by jealousy, suspicion or faithlessness. The love represented in the high plot partakes of these qualities, that of Valentine and Christina more so than that of Lydia and

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

Ranger. The loves represented by the low plot do not.

Of all the devices Wycherley uses in Love in a Wood by which to embrace the various forms of love within a framework permitting contrast, none seems so deliberately fashioned for its purpose as the one to which the title itself calls attention. Several critical approaches to the choice of the Park and the Mulberry Garden have been made, all of which contribute something to our appreciation of the diversity of motivations in Wycherley himself. Willard Connely suggests that in using the Park Wycherley had merely

transcribed what his own eyes and ears had told him in his saunterings between the Inner Temple and Covent Garden and Pall Mall for ten years, making the play in five acts and twenty-one scenes, with only two scenes in the Park, though with the final one in Mulberry Garden. This ending was aptly turned, because after a play the audiences in great part always resorted to Mulberry Garden for cheesecakes and Rhenish.<sup>42</sup>

It is helpful to know that Wycherley's able ear and keen sense of his surroundings enabled him to transform his routine experiences into comedy, but it is not necessary to believe that Wycherley's purpose in selecting and organizing his material as he has, consists of an attempt to leave an impression which the audience could savor along with their after theatre repast.

Most critics have assumed that the Park is merely a convenience used because it was simply the place people gathered to carry on their love affairs, not significant enough in itself to warrant special comment. This attitude reflects a bias similar to that of Connely's; namely, that Wycherley was primarily a naturalistic writer faithfully recording the scenes of life which he observed in order to amuse his fellow truewits.

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<sup>42</sup>Brawny Wycherley (New York, 1930), p. 59.

This view is expressed rather persuasively by Thomas H. Fujimura who begins with an assumption that Wycherley "was a Truewit--libertine, skeptical, and naturalistic--with a strong interest in wit."<sup>43</sup> Fujimura subsequently applies this assumption to his analysis of the play to which he gives qualified praise for its "expression of a naturalistic temper and for isolated instances of wit."<sup>44</sup> This too is a helpful approach to the play but one which cannot shed any light on the artistic uses to which the playwright has put his devices, much less on the possible moral uses to which he has put them. Most fruitful of the critical approaches to Wycherley's use of the Park, especially for one interested in Wycherley's dramatic commentaries on love, is the one adopted by Norman N. Holland, who writes:

The Park is an important symbol. It is a piece of country within the Town, and for Wycherley, the country stands for a place where one's inner nature is very close to the surface. So among the deceptions and pretenses of the Town, the Park brings out one's hidden nature. For the ordinary light of day is substituted Phoebus' other light, the light of wit and judgment. . . .

"In a Wood," as an idiom means "confused," and in the complexities of town life, confusion is exactly what results when the mask of pretense falls. The play begins, for all practical purposes, with a confusing episode in the Park and ends with an unconfusing in the park.<sup>45</sup>

Undoubtedly Wycherley has balanced confusion in the first Park scene against unconfusion in the last Park scenes, and the Park does bring out one's hidden nature. But having established this, it is necessary to go on and consider just what Wycherley permits to emerge and how his staging of both confusion and unconfusion in the Park help clarify his representation of

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<sup>43</sup>The Restoration Comedy of Wit (Princeton, N.J., 1952), p. 122.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>45</sup>The First Modern Comedies (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 43.

various kinds of love.

The first Park scene occurs in the opening scene of Act II. The mood of the Park and its significance as a place where normal inhibitions are relaxed become established immediately. Ranger, Vincent and Dapperwit appear and, appropriately, Ranger opens the scene:

Ran. Hang me if I am not pleased extreamly with this new fashion'd caterwauling, this midnight coursing in the Park.

Vin. A man may come after supper with his three bottles in his head, reel himself sober, without reproof from his Mother, Aunt, or grave relation.

Ran. May bring his bashful Wenches and not have her put out of Countenance by the impudent honest women of the Town.

Dap. And a Man of wit may have the better of the dumb shew, of well trim'd Vest, or fair Peruke; no man's now is whitest.

Ran. And now no Woman's modest, or proud, for her blushes are hid, and the rubies on her Lips are died, and all sleeping and glimmering Eyes have lost their attraction.<sup>46</sup>

In the night, distinctions are blurred. The outward signs of wit and modesty become obscured in the midnight blackness. In this scene Wycherley initiates the sequence of complications composing the Lydia-Ranger thread of the high plot, by having Ranger pursue Lydia, after the famous dialogue between her and Dapperwit on the wits of several kinds. Lydia is in the Park because of distrust of Ranger. "I come here," she tells Flippant, "to make a discovery tonight."<sup>47</sup> Indeed she does discover that Ranger is footloose, but it is not until she witnesses his importunities to Christina, who is forced to meet him at her door because of Lydia's deception, that the discovery occurs. Thus the Park in the first scene is the setting for deceit, the locale from which the whole chain of self-delusion and deception begins. It is the same with Flippant, who carries out the theme of self-delusion and deception in her very first speech of the scene. To Lydia's desire to make a discovery, she responds:

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<sup>46</sup>Summers, I, 88.    <sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

Flip. Of my love to you certainly; for no body but you cou'd have debauch'd me to the Park certainly; I wou'd not return another night, if it were to redeem my dear husband from his grave.<sup>48</sup>

Lydia immediately punctures Flippant's pretension:

Lyd. I believe you, but to get another, Widow.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, Flippant continues in the self-delusion and deception. When she encounters Sir Simon "muffled in a cloak," she dons a mask and engages him in an exchange of ribald dialogue which exposes Sir Simon's willingness to enjoy with an unknown woman the liberty that offends him in the woman he might just marry:

Sir Sim. Are you not a Fireship? a Punk, Madam?

Flip. Well, Sir, I love Raillery.

Sir Sim. Faith and Truth I do not railly, I deal freely.

Flip. This is the time and place for freedom, Sir.

Sir Sim. Are you handsom?

Flip. Joan's as good as my Lady in the dark, certainly; but Men that deal freely, never ask questions, certainly.

Sir Sim. How then! I thought to deal freely, and put a woman to the question, had been all one.

Flip. But let me tell you, those that deal freely indeed, take a woman by--

Sir Sim. What, what, what, what?

Flip. By the hand and lead her aside.

Sir Sim. Now I understand you, come along then.<sup>50</sup>

Before they can retire to a convenient spot to continue their conversation they are interrupted by torch bearing dancers wearing masks. By the torch light Flippant discovers Sir Simon's identity and becomes so indignant that she remains masked, as she puts it, "lest I should be disappointed of my revenge, for I will marry him."<sup>51</sup> The dancers in masks perfectly symbolize the motifs Wycherley has incorporated into this scene: Dalliance, disguise, deception. Moreover, the dance being a formalized activity reflects the importance of the formal, elaborate love intrigues that are the substitute for passion in both Sir Simon and Ranger. Wycherley has used the setting of

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.    <sup>49</sup>Ibid.    <sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 90.    <sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 91.



the Park to critically judge the love practiced by the characters he has put into the setting.

The entrance of the dancers is the fulcrum on which the two parts of the first Park scene are poised. The huddle of the four lovers serves a similar function in the second Park scene.<sup>52</sup> Prior to this huddle, Sir Simon's courtship of Martha comes to its end when Dapperwit and Martha leave the dazed Simon and seek a Parson to marry them. The four high plot characters emerge from the huddle paired up, with one member of each pair unsure of the other's identity. The business of subsequent scenes is to reveal the true identities of the lovers to each other and bring their plot into congruence with the low plot in the multiple betrothals in the Mulberry Garden, at the conclusion of the play. Again the Park serves to foster delusion and deception, but the delusion is self-delusion and the deception pervasive only in the scene involving Martha, Dapperwit and Sir Simon. Both Martha and Dapperwit repay Sir Simon's effort at deception with their own deception and Sir Simon's self-delusion is stripped away. Implicit in the scene, however, is the ingredient of Martha's deception of Dapperwit which will confront his self-delusion in the final scene of the play. The deception is not, therefore, accidental or superficial. It pervades the relationships among the three characters. The huddle which physically signals the beginning of new action clearly is a means of dividing the high plot scene and characters, which follow the huddle, from the low plot scene and characters which precede it. Since at the conclusion of the play, Sir Simon will be courting Flippant, who in the earlier Park scene, has vowed to take revenge by means of marriage, it is

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

clear that nothing is resolved for him in his discovery of Dapperwit's and Martha's comic treachery, any more than anything is resolved for Dapperwit in his coup.

Thus the unconfusion in the low plot is limited to an unconfusion as to where everyone stands in regard to everyone else. But the confusion within the characters remains. Sir Simon confuses intrigue with passion. Dapperwit confuses clever strategy at fortune seeking with true wit. Martha confuses infatuation and expediency with romance. In the final scene of the play, both Flippant and Gripe confuse revenge with love. The Park has not caused these confusions, but it has not clarified them either, and for a very good reason: They are inherent in the characters. Thus in the low plot, both the early and late Park scenes bring out the deception and self-delusion that passes for love between Sir Simon and Flippant and between Dapperwit and Martha. The unconfusion that takes place in the Park among the high plot characters differs significantly from that among the low plot characters. It is an unconfusion as to identity only; the confusion itself is caused by the accident of darkness and is not essential to the characters or to their relationships with each other. By the time Wycherley brings us to the last Park scene, it has already been abundantly established that Lydia's possessiveness springs from sincere devotion, that Valentine's jealousy, though imprudent and unmanly, arises from deep affection, that Ranger's faithlessness when faced with the penalty of Lydia's loss, has been chastened. Beneath the folly or excess of each of these characters lies deep feeling for the loved one. The Park scene has merely to straighten out the mistaken identities in order for confusion to disappear and the four young lovers to pair off, following which the members of each pair will seek happiness in each other.

Broadly speaking, Wycherley has used the devices in Love in a Wood to separate the love represented by the high plot from the counterfeits for love represented by the low plot. The sole criterion that seems to distinguish love from one of its counterfeits consists of the possession of genuine feeling for the object of attraction. Relationships that are entered for the purpose of wealth, advancement, revenge, expediency or any extraneous reason cannot become love relationships. Those that are entered because of passion, desire and affection can, despite any possible excessiveness or folly in the passion, desire and affection. This division may seem crude in itself, but when considered in relation to the characterizations in each plot, it sheds considerable light on the degree of Wycherley's adherence to the love ethos of his time. The cynicism that mocks ideals, the experimentalism that invites constant change, the skepticism toward conventions are all attitudes to be expected in characters living to the hilt the love ethos outlined in Chapter I. In addition we would expect to find a delight in stratagems and intrigues, an inveterate sensuality and a general looseness of conduct. All of these characteristics are to be found in the personages of the low plot. The attributes of the rake-epitome of the Restoration love ethic Wycherley has attached to those characters who do not love and, because of profound confusion, cannot love. Does this mean that he is interested mainly in satirizing false wits who attempt to live by a code for which they are unfit? Probably not, for if he were, then the high plot characters would be proficient at the code, and such clearly is not the case. Perhaps Ranger is a pale shadow of the Dorimant type, but Valentine is much farther removed from the calculating seducer than he is from the passionate innocent. Without his jealousy he would be a potential Vincent, but the changes in his character necessary to

make him a rakish cynic would be so many and so profound as to constitute not a reformation but a thorough reconstitution. Thus, it seems that in Love in a Wood, Wycherley has gone as far as refusing to idealize love. Even Christina, virtuous as she is, can become piqued and testy. In refusing to idealize love, Wycherley is following the Restoration mode of anti-Platonism. But it seems that in other respects, he is casting a cold eye on the manners governing love. He is holding up as a standard, not an epitome of the Restoration love ethos but the reminder that love is, after all, loving someone.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GENTLEMAN DANCING MASTER

In Love in a Wood Wycherley disposes his incidents within the high plot and the low plot in such a way as to achieve a rather complex array of types of love, broadly divisible into love that is a camouflage or pretext for greed or lust and love that is basically a feeling for the loved one. This broad, varied representation of love depends upon a complex plot and a variety in the characterization that lend the play a richness of design allowing numerous parallels, contrasts and resonances. The Gentleman Dancing Master has none of this. In it Wycherley practices a narrowness, restraint and simplicity of representation that, at times, force him to repetitiveness, as though his invention had temporarily deserted him. Yet the play delights because of the absurdly comic antics of Caution, Don Diego Formai and Monsieur de Paris. Furthermore, Hippolita is more interesting as a heroine than either Lydia or Christina. As for the representations of love in the play, less is offered than in Love in a Wood but in some respects Wycherley affords us insights into the conduct of love affairs, the feelings of the lovers and the conventionalities of courtship, marriage and illicit love that contribute much to an understanding of Wycherley's views of love and suggest his attitude toward the Restoration love ethos.

An outline of the plot reveals the compactness and relative simplicity of this play. Hippolita, a fourteen year old maiden, is engaged to be

married to her cousin, Monsier de Paris, a gallicized Englishman. Her father, Don Diego Formal, a Spanish merchant, affects Spanish customs, particularly those calculated to preserve the chastity of his daughter. Consequently, he severely restricts Hippolita, forbidding her any contact with a man. His sister, Caution, functions as a duenna and guards Hippolita's virtue even more jealously than does Don Diego himself. The plot consists merely of the complications arising out of Hippolita's efforts to evade the fated marriage and to exercise some measure of freedom. Her strategy for doing this consists of enlisting de Paris's aid in bringing Gerrard, a young gentleman whom she has seen from her window, into the house. Feigning a desire to make a fool of Gerrard, she asks de Paris to bring him to the house, her real desire being to encourage Gerrard to abduct her. Gerrard comes, but owing to a combination of his hesitancy and the vigilance of Don Diego and Caution, the abduction fails to materialize. Hippolita is forced to improvise a method of insuring Gerrard's return and has him pose as a dancing master who has been sent by her fiance to instruct her. Through his impersonation Gerrard is able to return to the house and plan an elopement, which Hippolita desires. She balks, however, at the moment when Gerrard actually comes to get her, necessitating a further succession of ruses, tricks and improvisations to elude the suspicions of Caution and the watchfulness of Don Diego. Hippolita's marriage to de Paris, meantime, approaches, and after some comic disagreement between the pseudo-Spanish father and the pseudo-French suitor resulting in de Paris's hilarious exchange of French pantaloons for Spanish hose, the wedding preparations are made. De Paris tells Gerrard that he and Hippolita have played a joke on him, embittering Gerrard towards Hippolita. In his next meeting with Hippolita, Gerrard's bitterness is assuaged by Hippolita's

pledge to marry him as soon as the means present themselves. The means arrive in the form of the parson, summoned, of course, to marry Hippolita to de Paris. Don Diego, having become convinced that Gerrard is a fraud tries to kill him, whereupon de Paris, feeling obliged to save the poor gull he has abused, defends Gerrard. He pushes him, along with Hippolita and the parson, into a room where they remain until he can placate the wrath of Don Diego. When Gerrard and Hippolita emerge they are man and wife. The disappointment of de Paris is salved by the prospects, not altogether splendid, of a relationship with Flirt, a prostitute with whom he has been intimate on the very night he sought Gerrard and encouraged him to visit Hippolita.

All of this plot action is supposed to happen within three days. None of it would be very believable except that the shrewdness and determination of Hippolita seem sufficient to carry off virtually any design she conceives. And that she would conceive such a design is established by the nature of the conflict between her natural desires and her father's unnatural repressions. In her opening speech to Prue, her maid, Hippolita draws attention to this conflict and sounds both her and Wycherley's distaste for the severities of "Spanish honor":

Hippo. To confine a Woman just in her rambling Age! take away her liberty at the very time she shou'd use it! O barbarous Aunt! O unnatural Father; to shut up a poor girl at fourteen, and hinder her budding; all things are ripen'd by the Sun; to shut up a poor girl at fourteen!<sup>1</sup>

To fully grasp the importance of The Gentleman Dancing Master as part of Wycherley's total exposition of love in its various aspects and meanings, it is necessary to accept his premise that a girl as young as Hippolita would be imaginative enough to conceive a plan the execution of which she

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<sup>1</sup>Montague Summers (ed.), The Complete Works of William Wycherley, 4 vols. (London, 1924), I. p. 157.

shares with her unwitting fiance, and brazen enough to act out her rather hazardous part in it. Wycherley is probably aware of the inherent improbability of this combination in a fourteen year old girl, sheltered since childhood and completely subjugated to her father's will and her aunt's caution. He attempts to reduce the improbability through Hippolita's opening speeches as well as through the clear implication that Prue, the maid, has not been averse to sharing her worldly knowledge with her young mistress. It is important for Wycherley to establish Hippolita's high spirit and independence not only to make the origination of the plan plausible but to present plausible salvations of the plan when it is threatened by her father or aunt. Yet he must also keep the audience convinced of Hippolita's sexual innocence, attested by the very fact of her confinement and insulation from experience. It is her innocence that makes convincing the quickness with which she falls genuinely in love with Gerrard, and it is the combination of resourcefulness and innocence in her which Gerrard so much admires and which holds him to her, though in his first meeting with her he is smitten by her innocence only, an innocence that does not extend to her motives. In Act II, the lovers first meet and immediately find themselves attracted to each other. After Hippolita makes a point of telling Gerrard that she has no experience with "Gallants of the Town,"<sup>2</sup> her disingenuous way of arousing his desire to abduct her, Gerrard observes: "Pretty Creature! she has not only beauty but the Innocency of an Angel."<sup>3</sup>

Hippolita is not innocent in the sense that she is incapable of dissimulation, for she remarks in an aside that dissimulation is "very natural to a woman" and "the mask of simplicity and innocency is as useful

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 174.    <sup>3</sup>Ibid.



to an intriguing woman, as the mask of Religion to a States-Man."<sup>4</sup>

However, she is innocent in a deeper sense, for she is capable of experiencing an amorous feeling and of admitting to herself that she has such a feeling. Through the feigned innocence of motive Wycherley is able to convincingly represent the development of Hippolita's design for evading the marriage to de Paris, whereas through her actual innocence of feeling he is able to convincingly depict the first stirrings of a genuine love. Ironically, it is Hippolita's feigned innocence that attracts Gerrard, who, of course, is not aware of her actual feelings for him. As the relationship between the two lovers develops, the original stimuli become unimportant. Hippolita's feigned innocence and Gerrard's surrender to it are merely the necessary conditions for the initiation of a serious love affair between them. Hippolita's deeper innocence as well as Gerrard's basic decency, demonstrated in his not abducting her despite her vulnerability, suggest the authenticity of the feelings they express for each other in their asides to the audience. Wycherley's dramatic investment in the early scenes is high, because in them the evidence that Hippolita is shrewd enough to carry off this plan of hers and Gerrard adaptable enough to stay with it must be combined with the demonstration that both Hippolita and Gerrard care more for each other than for the abduction which was their original intention. Once we are convinced 1) that this meeting between Hippolita and Gerrard could actually be taking place and 2) that in this meeting deep attractions are being aroused in the characters, Wycherley can proceed with the business of depicting what he depicts in no other play: first love in all its stages from attraction to consummation. The importance

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

of the Gentleman Dancing Master to an understanding of Wycherley's total view of love lies principally in this fact.

Through the characters of Hippolita and Gerrard, Wycherley traces the progress of first love through several stages. First, there is the pre-condition to love; namely, an interdiction which makes the forbidden object desirable. In this play as in many others the interdiction takes the form of parental will. Then there is the meeting of the lovers and the discovery of physical attraction. This stage has been discussed above. Next there is the acknowledgment of affection and the commitment of the lovers to each other. This is followed by threats which test the lovers' commitment. Finally there is the overcoming of the threats and the enjoyment of the reward. We shall see how Wycherley "fleshes out" this outline in the play in such a way as to convey the charm of romantic love while maintaining a skeptical stance in relation to its ultimate value.

After the lovers recognize their attraction to each other, the characters of Don Diego and Caution continue to function as the constraining authority which the cooperative efforts of Hippolita and Gerrard must circumvent. In Act II this function bears specifically on the action of his daughter. Being too solicitous of Hippolita's innocence, Gerrard fails to act until Hippolita holds out the prize of her fortune:

Hipp. Nay, I know you come to steal me away; because I am an Heiress, and have twelve hundred pound a year . . . .

Ger. Ha!

Hipp. So--this has made him consider, O money, powerful money! how the ugly, old, crooked, straight, handsom young Women are beholding to thee?

Ger. Twelve hundred pound a year--<sup>5</sup>

Hippolita voices the wisdom of Joyner and Lady Flippant, and Gerrard appears

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

no better than Dapperwit or Sir Simon Addleplot in his interest in the sum of her annuity. But Wycherley does not allow this affair to develop from the single-minded desire of Hippolita for freedom and of Gerrard for money. The entrance of Don Diego is Wycherley's way of preventing the union of the lovers out of these motives so that later on he can effect their union out of other motives. The simplicity of the conflict between the lovers and the forces of authority represented by Don Diego, Caution and eventually the Parson enables Wycherley to provide a clear study of the lover's actual feelings for each other, not their dissimulations. They are so busy, in fact, dissimulating before Don Diego in order to ward off his suspicions that there is no time to deceive each other. The pressure of his omnipresence and of Caution's remorseless suspicions necessitates on the lover's part an absolute singleness of purpose based on an unequivocal commitment to each other. An abduction in the second act would, of course, require an elaboration and complication of subsequent action which would hardly suit Wycherley's obvious intention to concentrate his satire against the apers of foreign manners. But this concentration of satire is by no means the only benefit derived from confining the play to a single place for almost its whole length and a single conflict in all of its scenes. Another benefit, perhaps more important, is that the process of love can be dramatized unencumbered by any suggestion of base motives or expediency. Such a suggestion would certainly be aroused by an abduction in the second act.

As the play unfolds after Act II, we find that, thrown into each other's company, Hippolita and Gerrard do relinquish their first motives for desiring the abduction, in preference for other, less selfish motives. A change of heart occurs in each of the two lovers, and in dramatizing this

change of heart Wycherley is very explicit. The change comes in Act IV, when for the second time Hippolita and Gerrard are on the verge of elopement. This time, however, the situation is slightly different from the first time, for the lovers are not new acquaintances but have spent some time in each other's company. They have committed themselves to each other to the extent of making a pact to elope. Moreover, they have actually planned an elopement. The audience has learned through the strident complaints of Caution that in the dancing lessons which have served as their pretext for continued meetings, they have been altogether too familiar with each other. Thus, we have been prepared to accept the idea that in addition to their original motives for desiring an elopement there is a sincere affection for each other. Now Wycherley makes it perfectly clear by removing the original motives that affection, or more precisely, desire to enjoy each other permanently, dictate their conduct. The change of heart begins with Gerrard resuming their elopement where it was interrupted by Don Diego in Act II. De Paris has been duped into holding the door to keep Don Diego out of the room where Hippolita and Gerrard are ostensibly practicing the dance to be performed for Don Diego later:

Ger. So, so, to make him hold the door, while I steal his Mistress is not unpleasant.

Hipp. Iy, but wou'd you do so ill a thing, so treacherous a thing? faith 'tis not well.

Ger. Faith I can't help it. Since 'tis for your sake, come, Sweetest, is not this our way into the Gallery?

Hipp. Yes, but it goes against my conscience to be accessary to so ill a thing: you say you do it for my sake?<sup>6</sup>

Suddenly Hippolita has scruples of conscience against which Gerrard's importunities and blandishments are of no avail. Hippolita is too shrewd a young woman not to realize that in refusing to accompany Gerrard she is

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

throwing away her only chance to escape marriage with de Paris. It is not likely that she is allowing her careful strategy of the day before to be destroyed by a sudden impulse to be contrary. Yet this is what she allows Gerrard to believe for a while:

Hipp. But, Sir, you cou'd believe I was in earnest in the morning, when I seemed to be ready to go with you, and why won't you believe me now, when I declare to the contrary? I take it unkindly, that the longer I am acquainted with you, you should have the less confidence in me.<sup>7</sup>

Gerrard is having his plan shaken, rudely, and the audience is undoubtedly wondering, along with him, what has suddenly possessed Hippolita. It can be argued that Wycherley simply needs something to impede the elopement, and Hippolita's feminine changeability will serve as well as anything. But Hippolita is not an erratic female. Thus far she has done nothing without reason and has not once allowed her control to slip. The crisis toward which she is forcing the dialogue, quite deliberately, I believe, occurs shortly after the exchange just quoted. Gerrard has finally accepted the sincerity of her refusal:

Ger. Then you will not go with me?

Hipp. No; but for your comfort your loss will not be great, and that you may not resent it, for once I'll be ingenuous and disabuse you; I am no Heiress, as I told you, to twelve hundred pound a year. I was only a lying Jade then, now you will part with me willingly I doubt not.

Ger. I wish I cou'd.

Hipp. Come, now I find 'tis your turn to dissemble; but men use to dissemble for money, will you dissemble for nothing?

Ger. 'Tis too late for me to dissemble.

Hipp. Don't you dissemble forth?

Ger. Nay, this is too cruel.<sup>8</sup>

This is the conclusion to which Hippolita was urging the dialogue. Her apparent capriciousness, her contrariety, her brazen admission of dissembling have been her methods of forcing Gerrard into a situation that would test

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 210.    <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

his commitment to her. Heretofore he has been committed to the plan for elopement, but his eagerness in Act II at the prospect of Hippolita's fortune must have raised many doubts in her mind as to the depth of his love for her. Now, in this scene, she is plumbing this depth and discovers that her line goes down much farther than she had probably expected. In forcing Gerrard to show his desire to take her without the fortune, she performs for Wycherley the function of plausibly dramatizing Gerrard's relinquishment of his first motive for desiring the elopement and the concomitant development of the second motive. Gerrard is no longer moved by avarice but by love. For the representation of this stage of the process of "first love" to be complete it remains for Hippolita to demonstrate to the audience that her first motive, freedom from her father's strictness, has been replaced by love for Gerrard.

Hippolita's demonstration of sincere affection for Gerrard begins immediately after her father and Caution barge into the room, rescuing Hippolita from Gerrard's efforts to persuade her by main force to honor her promise to elope with him:

Hipp. My Father, my Father is here.

Ger. Prevented again!

Don. What, you have done I hope now, Friend, for good and all?

Ger. Yes, yes, we have done for good and all indeed.

Don. How, now! you seem to be out of humour, Friend.

Ger. Yes, so I am, I can't help it.

Caut. He's a Dissembler in his very Throats Brother.

Hipp. Pray do not carry things so as to discover your self, if it be but for my sake, good Master. [Aside to Ger.

Ger. She is grown impudent. [Aside.<sup>9</sup>

This little episode contains all the elements of the most effective scenes of the play. There is the nervous watchfulness of Don Diego and Caution. There is the dramatic irony in the dialogue between Gerrard and Don Diego,

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

stemming from the obtuseness of Don Diego. There is the suspiciousness of Caution. But added to these components is the tension created by the bruised pride of Gerrard and Hippolita's whispered plea for his forbearance. Gerrard appears to be hurt by the refusal of Hippolita to accompany him. But Hippolita has no intention of allowing his chagrin to spoil her plans, which have not yet been disclosed, for an eventual marriage. Gerrard's impulse to give away the game, along with his conviction that Hippolita abuses him, reveal the strength of his attachment to the plan which her apparent wilfullness has just aborted. This strong attachment to the plan implies a strong attachment to Hippolita. Thus, Gerrard's ire in this scene indicates his love for Hippolita. Being less emotional and more calculating, Hippolita is less inclined to reveal her feelings. But her love is indicated nonetheless by her desire that Gerrard continue in his deception of her father. As if to make the urgency of Hippolita's feelings perfectly clear to the audience, Wycherley has her repeat her plea before Gerrard speaks again, even at the risk of arousing her father's suspicions:

Don. What's the matter, Friend?

Hipp. I say for my sake be in humour, and do not discover your self, but be as patient as a Dancing-Master still.

Don. What, she is whispering to him indeed! What's the matter? I will know it, Friend, look you.<sup>10</sup>

Gerrard controls his impetuousness and, falling back on the role of the dancing master, explains that his bad humor is a result of Hippolita's disobedience, continuing the dramatic irony which deceives the credulous Don while keeping the audience in touch with the true nature of the stage tension. The dialogue continues in this vein with Hippolita once again imploring Gerrard not to give away their deceit. Don Diego forces Gerrard and Hippolita to dance; while dancing Hippolita alludes to her true feelings

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 211-212.

for Gerrard:

Ger. I am in a pretty humour to dance. I cannot fool any longer, since you have fool'd me.

Hipp. You wou'd not be so ungenerous, as to betray the Woman that hated you, I do not do that yet; for Heaven's sake for this once be more obedient to my desires than to your passion.<sup>11</sup>

The audience must wait until Gerrard has suffered more and events finally move toward the culmination expected by Don Diego and de Paris before Hippolita actually accepts Gerrard as a lover and surrenders to his love. Still this scene will do as an indicator of the nature of her feelings. First of all, Hippolita says that she does not hate Gerrard which, for a person of her ironic wit, is tantamount to an admission of love. But more importantly, the fervor with which she begs his patience signifies love, for if she did not love him why would she care what he does? Obviously, she is not interested in him as a means of escape, for she has already rejected escape. There are only two possible reasons for her attempts to appease him and keep him under control so that he will not expose his deception and be dismissed. The first is a desire to play the game of deception for its own sake regardless of the pain it causes Gerrard. The second is a sincere desire to keep Gerrard with her because she loves him. The impassioned tone of her pleas to Gerrard as well as her generally pragmatic character would seem to preclude the first as a motivation. It seems, therefore, that Wycherley intends to indicate the second: Hippolita desires to protect Gerrard from his own impetuosity and chagrin because in doing so she strengthens the possibility of eventually having him as a husband, a desire which springs from love for him.

Wycherley has represented the stage of love consisting of commitment

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 212.



of the young lovers to each other by removing the alternative objects of desire, leaving only the person to which desire is directed. The money is removed as a possible object of Gerrard's desire, and escape is removed as a possible object of Hippolita's desire. Notwithstanding the fact that little time in the play is given to sentimental exchanges, sweet-talk and exaggerated professions of devotion, all of which might be consonant with the idea of first love, the authenticity of the attachment of the two lovers to each other is well established. Wycherley actually convinces us of the depth and sincerity of this young love by representing the characters in a relationship in which amorous feelings are either matter-of-factly admitted in asides and in dialogue between the characters or else assumed as the basis for the characters' actions. But never do the amorous feelings become important for their own sake. Never does Wycherley allow them to call the audience's attention to themselves. The love affair between Hippolita and Gerrard begins in pragmatism and ends in sincere love, yet Wycherley does not allow his characters to make any extravagant professions of love. As an artist he totally eschews sentimentality in depicting his characters' feelings for each other. In Act V, when Hippolita finally does consent to have Gerrard, she offers her love as a reward for his meeting of some very well established criteria for love:

Hipp. Well, Master, since I find you are quarrelsome and melancholy, and wou'd have taken me away without a Portion, three infallible signs of a true Lover, faith here's my hand now in earnest, to lead me a Dance as long as I live.<sup>12</sup>

To forestall the sort of passionate surrender to love typical of romantic representations, Wycherley does not permit Hippolita's offer to overcome Gerrard's skepticism, and we are reminded that though he wants her he is not

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

so foolish as to accept her offer at face value, given the pain he has suffered at her supposed whimsicality:

Ger. How's this? You surprise me as much as when first I found so much Beauty and Wit in Company with so much Innocency. But, dearest, I wou'd be assured of what you say, and yet dare not ask the question. You h----- do not abuse me again, you H----- will fool me no more sure.<sup>13</sup>

The commitment of the lovers to each other reaches its fulfillment when Gerrard finally does accept the assurances of Hippolita. From this point, they are acting truly as lovers. The opposition to their love posed both by their elders and by de Paris no longer constitutes the obstacles in an amusing game. It is a substantial threat to their serious intention of being united to each other. Thus Wycherley compresses the conflict between the lovers' desires and the restraints of their elders into a final episode of deception and circumvention in which, following the pattern that throughout the play has been Wycherley's ironic stock-in-trade, de Paris holds the door against Don Diego and Caution, protecting this time not only Gerrard and Hippolita but the parson as well, who has just arrived to perform the nuptials between de Paris and Hippolita. When the young couple emerge from the room as man and wife, it seems clear that this is really what Hippolita wanted after all. Indeed she has escaped from her father's demand to marry de Paris, and what's more she forfeits neither her fortune nor her father's affection. Don Diego's asinine unwillingness to admit his gullibility restores to the lovers everything their disobedience would threaten to deprive them of, and the marriage, thanks to the foolish pride of Don Diego is blessed after all:

Don. Rob'd of my Honour, my Daughter, and my Revenge too! Oh my dear Honour! nothing vexes me but that the World shou'd say, I had not Spanish Policy enough to keep my Daughter from being debauch'd

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

from me; but methinks my Spanish Policy might help me yet; I have it so--I will cheat 'em all; for I will declare I understood the whold plot and contrivance, and connived at it, finding my Cousin a Fool, and not answering my expectation. Well; but then if I approve of the Match, I must give this Mock Dancing-Master my Estate, especially since half he wou'd have in right of my Daughter, and in spite of me. Well, I am resolved to turn the cheat upon themselves, and give them my Consent and Estate.<sup>14</sup>

Though Don Diego's reasoning is absurd and the resolution of his problem ludicrous, his decision does effect the reconciliation between father and son-in-law essential to the light spirit of the play and the affirmation of the beauty and sincerity of the love between Gerrard and Hippolita. Since they are true lovers, they do deserve all that life can give them: the motives of Don Diego, the person empowered to give, become incidental to the appropriateness of the giving. Don Diego's resolution, absurd though it is, legitimates the love between Gerrard and Hippolita. It is significant that Don Diego's speech immediately follows the dialogue between de Paris and Flirt in which they are working out the details of their non-conjugal but contractual arrangement. With every demand that Flirt makes, de Paris protests that he will be as confined and abused as a married man even though no ceremony will unite him to Flirt. The arrangement represented in this dialogue, is one in which lover and mistress occupy separate houses and have separate lives, and in which the lover is a provider of luxuries for the mistress, while she is a means of pleasure and an enhancer of pride for him. This relationship, as de Paris reminds us, is in effect a marriage, as marriage was undoubtedly known to many members of the aristocracy and the court circle. But it is not the only possibility for marriage, and in making Flirt a whore and de Paris a hypocritical fraud, Wycherley is pointing to the fact that between vicious

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

people marriage will be rapacious and petty.

It is inconceivable that the marriage of Hippolita and Gerrard will in any way resemble this arrangement between de Paris and Flirt. Ironically, of course, the married couple will enjoy far greater freedom than will the unmarried couple, for the married couple has sealed a mutual commitment based on sincere feeling and respect rather than on crass demands and materialistic expectations. The consummation of the love affair of Hippolita and Gerrard is seen from three perspectives: First, from the perspective of its logical evolution out of the two characters' feelings for each other. Second, from the perspective of the paternal acceptance of the fait accompli of their marriage, which brings with it the promise of the material wealth they were willing to forfeit for their love. Third, from the perspective of their possibilities for a truly free and satisfying relationship, revealed by implied contrast to the sordid, selfish relationship of de Paris and Flirt.

As in Love in a Wood Wycherley has directed his satire against men and women who live by a false conception of love rather than against the institutions or conventions of love. Notwithstanding the unusual circumstances of their courtship, the love of Hippolita and Gerrard is an example of conventionalized literary romance. It is a love that moves from initial attraction to a commitment that overcomes all obstacles and finally to consummation in marriage. It is this pattern that renders various literary love affairs morally acceptable despite the excesses of the principals involved in them. It is the pattern behind the love between Jaffeir and Belvidera in Venice Preserved, Booth and Amelia in Amelia, Faulkner and Julia, Lydia and Captain Absolute in The Rivals, Millament and Mirabell in The Way of the World and many others. This pattern seems so invariably

associated with the moral conventions of seventeenth and eighteenth century British society that any departure from it or substitution of some other pattern of conduct for it becomes the subject of an appeal to a different standard of morality, as in All for Love, or the subject of semi-prurient comedy, as in Marriage a la Mode. Wycherley's representation of young love leading to marriage belies the notion that he was interested in satirizing marriage per se. He is interested of course in satirizing that kind of marriage contracted through "Articles and Settlements" and erected on the avarice and distrust of the partners. It is clearly the avarice and distrust that disturb Wycherley, at least in this play, and not the institution of marriage. And the evidence is that while Flirt and de Paris are avaricious and distrustful, and use "Articles and Settlements," they do not become legally married.

In Love in a Wood Wycherley is interested in showing the differences between love as an engagement of the emotions and love as a procedure or arrangement for furthering the objectives of a vice. In The Gentleman Dancing Master he manifests precisely the same interest, though in a simpler, more circumscribed set of incidents, with fewer characters and hence with fewer varieties of love represented. In both plays Wycherley satirically exposes the vices that substitute themselves for love in order that he may encourage the audience's rejection of them. In both plays he dramatizes the necessity to become purified of strong vice and selfish preoccupations in order to become a lover. Valentine must rid himself of jealousy. Ranger must cease being inconstant. Gerrard must relinquish his desire for Hippolita's money, and Hippolita must abandon the desire for mere escape. The love affair in The Gentleman Dancing Master differs from the love affairs of the high plot of Love in a Wood in that in the latter play the

obstacles to the fulfillment of love were exclusively flaws within the characters. In contrast, in The Gentleman Dancing Master real external obstacles exist in the persons of Don Diego, Caution and de Paris. Once the misunderstandings are cleared up in the high plot of Love in a Wood, things go smoothly for the lovers. But in The Gentleman Dancing Master only the misunderstandings keep the lovers together, and when Gerrard, piqued at Hippolita's refusal to leave with him, seems on the verge of removing Don Diego's misunderstanding, the love affair faces its most serious threat.

In showing that love is not lust, not greed, not jealousy and not escapism Wycherley is implicitly challenging the Hobbesian definition of love. Love, at least of the kind that he clearly wants his audience to admire and respect, should exclude all these things, though the movement toward love may originate in any one or any combination of them. Love itself brings honesty, selflessness and devotion. But one can possess these virtues, as Vincent does, without being a lover. Love as represented in Love in a Wood and The Gentleman Dancing Master is not a mere desire for or movement toward an object, though it may presuppose both. It requires the purging of vice yet it is not merely the sum total of virtue, and the lover devoid of faults, as Christina, is less convincing and less attractive than the one who, like Hippolita, can be a trial to one's patience. It would seem then that Wycherley is not prepared to accept the Hobbesian premises about love. He does of course present love even in the chaste Christina as a passion springing out of physicality. In The Gentleman Dancing Master, he becomes more explicit in connecting love to sexuality, which to be healthy must not be repressed. Early in the first act Caution and Hippolita have the following conversation:

Hipp. . . . I have never lived so wicked a life, as I have done this twelve month, since I have not seen a man.

Mrs. Caut. How! how! If you have not seen a man, how cou'd you be wicked? how cou'd you do any ill?

Hipp. No, I have done no ill, but I have paid it with thinking.

Mrs. Caut. O that's no hurt; to think is no hurt; the ancient, grave and godly cannot help thoughts.

Hipp. I warrant, you have had 'em your self, Aunt.

Mrs. Caut. Yes. yes! When I cannot sleep.

Hipp. Ha, ha--I believe it, but know, I have had those thoughts sleeping and waking: for I have dream't of a man.<sup>15</sup>

If it can safely be said that Wycherley is no Hobbesian, it can be said with perhaps even greater safety that he is no Platonist. Certainly, in his anti-Platonism so clearly revealed in this dialogue Wycherley partakes of the Restoration love ethos. In his skepticism toward unrealistic conceptions of human virtue he is a man of his times. But his skepticism also applies to over-materialistic and over-mechanistic explanations of human emotions. It applies to uncritical rejections of ideals and conventions simply because the people using them are not admirable. In The Gentleman Dancing Master, as in Love in a Wood, Wycherley operates as a satirist against vice, not against classes, conventions or traditional forms per se. In this he is a man for all ages, for vice is universal. In his thoroughgoing skepticism, applied even to the philosophical premises of skepticism itself he is a man of his own times. So is he also a man of his times in his objectivity, his refusal to endorse even the attractive love of Hippolita and Gerrard, for example, by sentimentalizing it. On the other hand, he will not mock the young love he describes. He presents it to us in all its charm and with all its promise. The fact that it exists at all attests the power of this emotion which transcends vice yet is not virtue. With an objective eye Wycherley measures this power within those

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 162-63.

who are moved by it. He also essays to measure the extent of it over mankind, and he finds that really very few men experience it. Gerrard is the rare man; de Paris is the ordinary man, the man who can turn from the disappointment of losing his fiance to the prospect of an arrangement with an obliging mercenary. Thus far, it can be said that for Wycherley love is not the love-chase, the mystique of intrigue, the sensual experimentalism, all of which one might encounter in those who practiced the Restoration love ethos. But that is not to say that Wycherley was raising an alternative to the love ethos of his time, that he was necessarily recalling men to an ideal. Love does exist, and it is not reducible to a mere impulse or a need for acquisition. So much does Wycherley show. But that love has any influence among most men Wycherley does not show. It is perfectly in keeping with the ingredient of scientific realism within the Restoration love ethos that Wycherley should refrain from universalizing love, just as it is perfectly in keeping with the skepticism of the time that he reject not only the idealization of love but also the contemporary materialization of it. In his first two plays, Wycherley has neither totally accepted the suppositions of the Restoration love ethos, nor has he totally rejected them. He has simply used them, perhaps unconsciously, though that is not likely, to offer his own unique observations.



## CHAPTER V

### THE COUNTRY WIFE

No student of Wycherley would fail to set The Country Wife and The Plain Dealer in a class apart from Love in a Wood and The Gentleman Dancing Master. Indeed few critics have deigned to spare more than a few words on these earlier efforts, reserving their attention for the more complex later plays. In attempting to discover Wycherley's modes of representing love and the possible meanings behind them, a study of the two lesser plays is indeed helpful, for it puts to rest such generalizations about the Restoration comedy as the following:

In their world an honorable man was one who was true to his friends, lent them money, listened to their brags, drank with them, seconded their duels. But between man and woman there was no honor; there was only pursuit, conquest and enjoyment.<sup>1</sup>

The first sentence of this quotation can be applied with no difficulty to Ranger, Valentine, Vincent or Gerrard, all of them young men of the town. But of the four, only Ranger vigorously lives by the code referred to in the second sentence; and his resolution to adhere to the code does not stand up very well against the possibility of losing Lydia. Perhaps Gerrard too is motivated by the impulses of the libertine. But the fact is that in his first two plays Wycherley rarely approaches a representation of social life anything like the life suggested in the

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<sup>1</sup>John H. Wilson, The Court Wits of the Restoration (Princeton, 1948), pp. 172-73.

second sentence of the quotation, except in the low plot of Love in a Wood and in the affair between de Paris and Flirt. Significantly, neither of these instances involves characters from the court circle itself.

In his representations of love in these early plays, Wycherley seems interested in showing the difference between love that is genuine and love that is counterfeit; his characters are of little importance in themselves, and with the possible exception of Hippolita, none of the characters representing genuine love offers much suggestion of depth beneath the represented surface. In The Country Wife and The Plain Dealer we should not expect a greater variety of love to be represented, for Wycherley has laid out for us in the first two plays all the important varieties of love that interest him. Wycherley will, in his later plays, exhibit intensifications of the conflict between true love and false love, and he will omit the idealizations of love such as are found in the love of Christina and Valentine. His focus actually becomes somewhat narrower, but his light more intense and revealing. Whereas in Love in a Wood and The Gentleman Dancing Master, he employs situation and contrast to make his comments upon the subject of love, in the later plays he becomes more intrigued by character and he uses characterization to dramatize his views on the subject. This increased interest in character enables Wycherley to fully display his dramatic genius, for in the last two plays what especially persists in attracting attention are the characters of Horner and Margery, Manly and Olivia.

In The Country Wife itself, Wycherley consummates his attempts to embody certain impulses and proclivities into fully believable men and women. Looking at the male characters, it is possible to detect the resemblances that mark them as the lineal descendants of earlier characters.

But as a rule they are more robust, more convincing, and of greater consequence to Wycherley's themes than were their progenitors. Sparkish, for instance, is de Paris and Sir Simon Addleplot combined. His passion is to be "in the swim," to pass at all costs as a man about town. But the proof of sophistication for Sparkish lies neither in his dress nor in his intrigues, but in his immunity from jealousy. This fact adds a dimension to his character only adumbrated in his early counterparts, for it suggests the truth that an extreme even of a virtue is a perversion. Sparkish's extreme indifference to the threat of a rival is as reprehensible and as absurd as Valentine's extreme jealousy at the mere thought of a rival. It may be imprudent to assert that Valentine's descendant in The Country Wife is Pinchwife, so many differences exist between them. But it seems wholly within probability that in Pinchwife Wycherley is exploring the character of a Valentine who has arrived at middle age lacking the benefit of the wise counsel of Vincent and of the lesson learned in recognizing that he has been foolishly wrong. Harcourt combines the forbearance and wisdom of Vincent and the amorous briskness of Gerrard. "What happens," Wycherley seems to be asking, "when a man of the town, with virtuous instincts and libertine habits falls in love?" In Love in a Wood, he does not ask the question, for to do so would be to encumber the already complicated plot with still another line of action. But in The Country Wife he can articulate an answer to the question, for there is room within the framework of the plot to permit Harcourt and Alithea to work out their destinies.

The female characters in The Country Wife can also be seen as the offspring of characters in the earlier plays. Who is Lady Fidget but a blend of the Widow Flippant and Caution: Decorum and propriety on the outside; lechery on the inside. It is not stretching a point to maintain

that Margery Pinchwife has been anticipated in Hippolita; both of them are mixtures of innocence and guile. And Alithea is virtually a duplicate of Christina, though in her absurd loyalty to Sparkish she exceeds even Christina's passion for rectitude. Of course, none of the characters in The Country Wife bears an exact resemblance to the earlier characters, and that is what makes them interesting. They do reveal Wycherley's occupation with a few basic themes, but they also show that while confining himself to these themes he had managed to develop as a playwright and to progress from the moderately comic early plays to the creation of a true comic masterpiece in The Country Wife. In plotting the action of this play, as in the creation of characters for it, Wycherley has matured. His plot is more refined and concentrated and at the same time better developed.

The play contains three plot lines, each of them designed to dramatize certain aspects of love. First, there is the plot line bringing Harcourt and Alithea together. Second, there is the line bringing Horner and Margery together. Third, there is the line bringing Horner and Lady Fidget together. The first of these plot lines represents a love similar to that of Gerrard and Hippolita and to some extent of Valentine and Christina. In these affairs, young women as yet uncorrupted by the blandishments of the Town succeed in possessing the lovers of their choice by surmounting or removing an obstacle. Christina's obstacle is Valentine's jealousy. Hippolita's is Gerrard's apparent eagerness for her annuity. In The Country Wife, Wycherley puts a twist on this pattern by confronting his heroine with an obstacle not in her lover but in herself. Alithea must overcome her silly notion that because Sparkish's love is without jealousy she owes him undying loyalty. The second plot line--that involving Horner and Margery--essentially elaborates on the line by which Lydia and Ranger are brought

together and the line which Hippolita and Gerrard follow toward the consummation of their love. It consists quite simply of representing everything that a young woman must do to finally possess the man of her choice. It is pertinent to this comparison that, like Lydia and Hippolita, Margery has marriage as her aim. Her aim is impossible. The impossibility becomes poignantly clear when Margery reluctantly acquiesces in the deception urged on her at the end of the play. The irony is increased when Margery's failure is contrasted to the success of the other heroines. In the third plot line Wycherley offers a richly ironic rendition of the cynical courtship pattern. This pattern occurs in the affair between de Paris and Flirt and also incipiently in Sir Simon's courtship of Flippant, and Alderman Gripe's courtship of Lucy Crossbite. Essentially this pattern consists of action undertaken by two people, neither of whom has any illusions about the motives of the other, to find an arrangement that will satisfy both their needs, bringing a maximum of pleasure with a minimum of risk and a minimum of emotional investment. In The Country Wife Wycherley allows this pattern its maximum scope, making it an important unit of the play and endowing it with wide and diverse possibilities for satire.

In considering the modes of love represented in The Country Wife, it is difficult to apply any pat formula to achieve easy classification.

Suppose one begins with Kathleen Burton's idea that:

In Restoration comedy the concept of sex resolves itself into statements about the sex war; they are saying either 'I must have you though I don't care for you,' or, very occasionally, 'I am in love with you, but I won't admit it for fear you'll take advantage of it.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Restoration Literature (London, 1958), p. 72.

There is no character in the play to whom one would feel confident in attaching either of the two statements offered by Miss Burton. Or suppose one begins with Norman Holland's idea that the significance of the play lies in the "contrast of three closely woven lines of intrigue,"<sup>3</sup> two of which define a "wrong way," and one of which defines a "right way."<sup>4</sup> One would be in a better position to classify the modes of love by using this idea, for it has the virtue of drawing attention to the major lines of intrigue and of suggesting one of the possible differences between two of them and the third. But Holland's idea expresses a conclusion, the supporting arguments of which seem dubious, especially as regards Horner's stratagem to get women.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Holland's idea seems inadequately qualified as a starting point for analysis. As with so much of the criticism on Wycherley's plays, both Burton's and Holland's statements presume an inflexible social code. For Burton this code determines patterns of response between lovers. Holland's view is more complex but not necessarily different. His "right way" is the way of Alithea and Harcourt and is defined by their lack of pretense. In this respect they actually reject the social code under which Pinchwife and Horner live. Thus, for Holland too, a rigid social code is presumed to underly both the "right way" and the "wrong way." Undeniably there is a social code represented in the plays, but to make judgments about the love themes as though these themes are influenced if not entirely determined by the presence of a social code, is to some extent to deny the independence of the characters and to suggest that their actions are limited to compliance to or defiance of the social code. But in The Country Wife it is precisely the capacity among important characters to act out of their independent wills without direct reference to the social

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<sup>3</sup>"The Country Wife," Restoration Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. John Loftis (New York, 1966), p. 85.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.    <sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 86-92.

code that distinguishes this play from Wycherley's earlier comedies and thrusts character into preeminent importance in the play.

Working more through character than through situation, Wycherley demonstrates in The Country Wife that both the subject matter of his representations of love and the moral criteria inhering in the representation have been derived from elements of the Restoration love ethos. Let us examine the three plot lines, beginning with the Alithea-Harcourt affair, to see how Wycherley accomplishes this. Superficially considered, the love affair of Alithea and Harcourt is simple enough. The two lovers meet for the first time in Act II, when Sparkish, eager to advance himself as a wit in Harcourt's estimation, proudly introduces Alithea to him. The introduction scene is a model of concise representation, for besides the exchange between Sparkish's officious courting of Harcourt's approval and Harcourt's double-meaning replies, designed to express his interest in Alithea, there are the chorus-like punctuations of the cynical Pinchwife:

Spark. Tell me, I say, Harcourt, how dost thou like her? Thou hast star'd upon her enough to resolve me.

Har. So infinitely well, that I cou'd wish I had a Mistress too, that might differ from her in nothing, but her love and engagement to you.

Alith. Sir, Master Sparkish has often told me, that his Acquaintances were all Wits and Railleurs, and now I find it.

Spark. No, by the Universe, Madam, he does not railly now; you may believe him: I do assure you, he is the honestest, worthiest, true hearted Gentleman--A man of such perfect honour, he wou'd say nothing to a Lady, he does not mean.

Pinch. Praising another Man to his Mistress!<sup>6</sup>

The surface of the scene is alive with comic irony, not only in Harcourt's compliment of "insidious intent" but in Sparkish's praise of precisely that virtue, honor, of which Harcourt seems devoid. And underneath the surface

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<sup>6</sup>Montague Summers (ed.), The Complete Works of William Wycherley, 4 vols. (London, 1924), II, 25.

the stage is being set for another comedy as well; it is a comedy that consists of the unpredictability of the two lovers as opposed to the predictability of Sparkish and Pinchwife. Alithea does not greet Harcourt's compliment with a similarly ambiguous response; she does not respond with a polite compliment on the surface, and semi-lewd invitation underneath. Instead she deflects his innuendo and puts him in his place. Alithea's candor here is the hallmark of her character, and it bodes ill for the success of Harcourt's game. Yet because she will not stubbornly defend Sparkish's claim on her beyond the point at which Sparkish seems to deserve the claim, she will eventually fulfill Harcourt's wish.

Besides falling in love with Harcourt, though, she must fall out of her sense of duty to Sparkish, and in her persistence in remaining at odds with her own feelings of love she is unlike any of the other of Wycherley's heroines. Indeed, her loyalty to Sparkish becomes obstinate to the point of folly. In the face of all of Sparkish's efforts at thrusting Harcourt on her, she remains steadfast, sternly remonstrating Harcourt's blandishments to her and his insults to her fiancé:

Alith. Hold, do not rail at him, for since he is like to be my husband, I am resolved to like him: Nay, I think I am oblig'd to tell him, you are not his Friend.--Master Sparkish, Master Sparkish.

Spark. What, what; now dear Rogue, has she not wit?

Har. Not so much as I thought, and hoped she had.<sup>7</sup>

Undoubtedly the audience sympathizes with Harcourt at this point and wonders whether Alithea is impervious to evidence, of which there has been an abundance, that Sparkish is not worthy of her love. The fact is, of course, that she does not love Sparkish at all, but will not abandon her duty to him simply because an eager gallant exploits her fiancé's

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 27.



simplemindedness to press his own case. Of course, in the early scenes in which Alithea and Harcourt are together Alithea may discern that Harcourt's motives are not so attractive. He has no intention of replacing Sparkish as a fiance. His interest follows the principle he sets forth in his first appearance on stage. On this occasion he is in company with his fellow gallant Dorilant and, of course, with Horner, who is posing as the maimed debauchee:

Hor. Well a Pox on love and wenching. Women serve but to keep a man from better Company; though I can't enjoy them, I shall you more: good fellowship and friendship, are lasting, rational and manly pleasures.

Har. For all that give me some of those pleasures, you call effeminate too, they help to relish one another.

Hor. They disturb one another.

Har. No, Mistresses are like Books; if you pore upon them too much, they daze you, and make you unfit for Company; but if us'd discreetly, you are the fitter for conversation by 'em.<sup>8</sup>

This exchange certainly belies Sparkish's praise of Harcourt as a man of honor. He appears to be a thoroughgoing Epicurean, anticipating by several years Rochester's Epicurean definition of right reason in "A Satyr against Mankind":

I own right Reason, which I would obey:  
That Reason that distinguishes by sense,  
And gives us Rules, of good, and ill from thence:  
That bounds desires, with a reforming Will,  
To keep 'em more in vigour, not to kill.<sup>9</sup>

Underlying the dialogue of Harcourt and Horner is skepticism. Indeed their little dialogue can be viewed as a skeptical opposition of values in which neither value deserves final claim to one's assent. Harcourt resolves the opposition into an Epicurean harmony in which the value of sexual

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>9</sup>Poems by John Wilmot Earl of Rochester, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto (London, 1953), p. 121.

enjoyment complements the value of "conversation." In this resolution Harcourt demonstrates wit of an even higher order than he does in his double-meaning compliment to Alithea. Thus his character shows unmistakable signs of the libertine mentality. Significantly, though, Wycherley permits love to stir Harcourt to become a man of honor, so that in the end he truly does live up to Sparkish's definition of his character, though not in the way Sparkish intends, for Harcourt's honor is all for Alithea and not for Sparkish.

What is especially significant about all this is that the woman who conquers Harcourt is not herself either a wit or a successful player of the game of dissembling. She is not crafty as is Hippolita. She is not single-minded and bold as is Lydia. She is not a free-thinking minx like, say, Florimell in Dryden's Secret Love. Wycherley makes it very clear that Harcourt's attachment to Alithea is genuine, and he does so in such a way as to bring out the honor of Harcourt's character, using honor to mean loyalty capable of withstanding the severist test. This honor is inspired by the character of Alithea arousing the dormant potential for honor within the character of Harcourt. The test of Harcourt's honor occurs in Act V when Alithea demands that Horner disabuse Pinchwife of the suspicion that she and Horner have had an assignation. Being only interested in protecting Margery, who hides in the next room, Horner cannot reveal that Alithea did not visit him:

Pinch. She bids you speak.

Alith. Ay, pray Sir do, pray satisfie him.

Hor. Then, truly, you did bring that Lady to me just now.

Pinch. O ho-

Alith. How Sir-

Har. How, Horner!

Alith. What mean you Sir. I always took you for a man of Honour?

Hor. Ay, so much a man of Honour, that I must save my Mistress.  
 I thank you. Come what will on 't. [Aside.<sup>10</sup>

Lucy tries desperately to speak, hoping to clear up the mystery and vindicate Alithea. But she is unable to. While Pinchwife and Sparkish stand convinced of Alithea's guilt, Harcourt steps forward to redeem her honor:

Har. Madam, then have no trouble, you shall now see 'tis possible for me to love too, without being jealous, I will not only believe your innocence myselfe, but make the world believe it.<sup>11</sup>

This episode provides exactly the situation necessary to bring Alithea to act on her true desires and give herself to Harcourt, who demonstrates that he excels in the virtue she demands in a lover--the absence of jealousy. More importantly, though, it manifests the change in Harcourt, a change forced on him by the exigencies of Alithea's predicament but a change predetermined by the capability within his character to transcend his epicurean nature when moved by the power of love.

As a character, Alithea must be classified with those creations of Wycherley who while manifesting an acquaintance with the way of the world do not themselves relish the games of dissimulation and intrigue. She is not exactly a female Vincent, for her passions are more susceptible, but she exercises her ability to apply her knowledge of the world in order to actually preserve the conventional forms of courtship and marriage rather than to act the iconoclast. In this respect, she is reminiscent of Vincent. In Act II Alithea characterizes herself, in her defense against Pinchwife's accusations, in such a way as to suggest that contrary to the suspicions of the Pinchwives of the world, a woman can be experienced without being depraved:

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<sup>10</sup>Summers, p. 83. <sup>11</sup>Ibid.

Pinch. What, you wou'd have her Margery as impudent as your self, as errant a Jilflirt, a godder, a Magpy, and to say all a meer notorious Town-Woman?

Alith. Brother, you are my only Censurer; and the honor of your family shall sooner suffer in your Wife there, than in me, though I take the innocent liberty of the Town.<sup>12</sup>

Alithea's defense touches on the theme of Pinchwife's repressive jealousy which, like the Spanish honor of Don Diego, can only drive the young victim to seek those pleasures which are forbidden. Honor cannot be enforced by restrictions but rather by experience coupled with judgment. In alluding to the truth that jealousy only breeds contempt, which in turn, brings cuckoldry, Alithea voices a thesis dear to the heart of the debauched gallants of the town. In the scene immediately preceding this one, Pinchwife boasts to Horner, Harcourt and Dorilant that he has married a girl too foolish to cuckold him. Horner, in response, affirms the gallants' thesis:

Pinch. A fool cannot contrive to make her husband a Cuckold.

Horn. No, but she'll club with a Man that can; and what is worse, if she cannot make her Husband a Cuckold, she'll make him jealous, and pass for one, and then 'tis all one.<sup>13</sup>

The point of Horner's response is implicitly shared by Alithea's response. Thus, Alithea manifests with the most debauched of the three gallants a knowledge of the town far more incisive and more genuine than Pinchwife's boasted knowledge. Yet she has not gained this knowledge, as have they through the experience of debauchery, as her continued defense of her character makes clear:

Pinch. Hark your Mistress, do not talk so before my Wife, the innocent liberty of the Town!

Alith. Why, Pray, who boasts of any intrigue with me? What Lampoon has made my name notorious? What ill Women frequent my Lodgings? I keep no Company with any Women of Scandalous reputations.

Pinch. No, you keep the Men of scandalous reputations Company.

Alith. Where? wou'd you not have me civil? Answer 'em in a Box at

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 23.    <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

the Plays? In the drawing room at Whitehall? In St. James's Park? Mulberry Garden? or--<sup>14</sup>

Alithea's speeches to Pinchwife provide a catalogue of habits and locales which taken together would suggest the life of a Town jade. But she is not a Town jade, as subsequent actions reveal. She lives by a code of personal honor so stringent as to border on quixoticism. Wycherley's intention in depicting Alithea in this fashion seems twofold. First, he must contrast her to Margery, for part of the dramatic interest of the total play lies in the contrast between the love affair of Harcourt and Alithea on the one hand, and Margery and Horner on the other. In equating ignorance with innocence, Pinchwife commits a serious error, for which he is eventually punished with cuckoldry. The line of action by which Margery's country shrewdness unfolds should be held against the line of action by which Alithea's incorruptible honor is manifested. This opposition increases the irony of Pinchwife's folly. Besides this dramatic effect, Wycherley is giving embodiment to some philosophical ideas. In her knowledge of the town Alithea resembles Horner. In her actions she is the ideal that Pinchwife desires in his wife. Margery, in her ignorance of the town, is the ideal that Pinchwife demands; but in her actions she shows a craft and a sensuality equal to Horner's. Thus the respective predilections of these two female characters to debauchery is not determined by their ignorance or by their knowledge. On the other hand, it cannot be said generally from evidence within the play itself that knowledge protects one from vice, while ignorance prompts one to experiment, for Lady Fidget and her disciples in licentiousness are all in possession of knowledge of the town. Further, it cannot be argued that

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

jealousy and external restraint necessarily bring vice, for has not Alithea been subjected to her brother's watchfulness before he was married? Hobbes postulated that in a state of nature man was the victim of his appetites. As the primitive, Margery comes closest to resembling the Hobbesian natural man, both in her previous freedom from social restraint and in the power of her instincts. Yet she acts no worse than Lady Fidget, who epitomizes social propriety, decorum and respectability. On the other hand, the romantic idea that civilization corrupts is belied by the character of Alithea. Operating in the skeptic fashion, Wycherley points up inadequacies and limitations both to the Hobbesian and to the romantic idea. Alithea is virtuous not only because, and certainly not necessarily because, she is experienced, for by following that premise one would expect Lady Fidget to be a saint. Alithea is virtuous because she is virtuous. Similarly, Margery is sexually curious not only because she has been sheltered, but because she is simply that way. That Margery's sexuality would exist independent of her virtual imprisonment is evidenced in the letter she composes in Act IV and sends to Horner. In it, she admits her attraction to Horner and writes:

I'm sure if you and I were in the Countrey at Cards together,--so-  
I cou'd not help treading on your Toe under the Table--so-or rubbing  
knees with you, and staring in your face, 'til you saw me-very  
well. . . .<sup>15</sup>

Wycherley is using character both in Margery and in Alithea, to whom our attention must return presently, to challenge the simple equations of Town=Vice, Country=Innocence. It is not far-fetched to suggest here that Wycherley is operating under two premises. First, there is the skeptic's premise that no value is absolute because every proposition can be countered

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

by an equally valid contrary proposition. Secondly, there is the scientist's premise that definitive judgments must be withheld until all the facts are in. In exposing exceptions, unusual cases, unique character, Wycherley is upholding these skeptical and scientific premises, and in the case of the opposition of Alithea and Margery, he is promoting them against the Hobbesian premise about human nature, which allows for no exceptions.

Now to return to Alithea's part in the love affair with Harcourt. Besides her obstinate loyalty to Sparkish, Alithea reveals another strong character trait. She refuses to countenance jealousy in a lover. This trait has been previously touched on by Wycherley but not explored in its full implications, in the character of Christina, whose love for Valentine is jeopardized by his jealousy. The exclusion of jealousy from love constitutes a principal tenet of the Restoration love ethos. Its place in the relations between the sexes has been suggested in the poems by Sedley and Rochester quoted in Chapter I. That it is a principle of some durability is indicated by the fact that both Florimell in Dryden's Secret Love, and Millament in Congreve's The Way of the World, plays representing respectively the beginning and the end of the period of Restoration Comedy, demand that their lovers abjure jealousy. The absence of jealousy, then, can be interpreted as a sign of election to the Cult of Restoration love. The employment of this trait as a criterion of election undoubtedly emerges from the combination of forces underlying the whole of the Restoration love ethos. Hobbes's philosophy would preclude jealousy because it would deny the probability that a lover would be eternally devoted to an ideal, i.e. the ideal of constancy, under the pressure of his instincts and appetites. The scientific manner of thinking would exclude jealousy for the same reason that it would exclude credulousness and superstition; namely, because it

brings an unnecessary limit to experience, and experience is, according to the scientific philosophy, the basis of truth. Skepticism would have no place for jealousy, because jealousy supposes that nothing exists, or ought to exist, in the desire of a lover of equal attraction to the loved one. Of course, Alithea has no notion of these intellectual concepts; she merely embodies a single trait supported by them. Ironically, however, Alithea's insistence that her lover be free of jealousy becomes the sole criterion of his worthiness of her love. Consequently she adheres to Sparkish after she no longer loves him and thereby forfeits the very freedom which the criterion of non-jealousy is supposed to foster. Thus Wycherley shows that it is possible to take a modern principle of conduct and by embracing its letter while ignoring its spirit to prevent the liberating effect it is intended to produce.

The audience is reminded that Alithea is being excessive when in Act II the playwright permits Harcourt to court Alithea and to advance cogent arguments against her obduracy:

Alith. The writings are drawn, Sir, settlements made; 'tis too late, Sir, and past all revocation.

Har. Then so 'tis my dear.

Alith. I wou'd not be unjust to him.

Har. Then why to me so?

Alith. I have no obligation to you.

Har. My love.

Alith. I had his before.

Har. You never had it; he wants you see jealousie, the only infallible sign of it.

Alith. Love proceeds from esteem; he cannot distrust my virtue, besides he love me, or he wou'd not marry me.

Har. Marrying you, is no more sign of his love, than bribing your Woman, that he may marry you, is a sign of his generosity: Marriage is rather a sign of interest, than love; and he that marries a fortune, covets a Mistress, not loves her: But if you take Marriage for a sign of love, take it from me immediately.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 26.



There are three ironies in this exchange, all of them revelatory of Wycherley's complex manner of representing love and one of them indicative of his challenge to the prevailing habit of eschewing jealousy. First there is the irony of Alithea's equation of love with marriage. This is ironic because Alithea has observed the marriage of her own brother; indeed she has defended her sister-in-law from her brother's contemptible oppression. In the face of this marriage, which contains neither love nor esteem, she makes her equation. Secondly, there is the irony of Harcourt's reversal when, immediately after denying that marriage is a sign of love, he offers to accept Alithea's equation and marry her to prove his love. Not only in his ready acceptance of her equation but in his willingness to abandon his rakish principles does Harcourt eagerly submit to this irony. Finally, there is the irony inherent in Harcourt's assertion that jealousy is the infallible sign of love. This is the same Harcourt who in a previous scene derided Pinchwife for being as jealous of Margery as a "Cheapside Husband of a Covent-Garden Wife."<sup>17</sup> Of course in interpreting these last two ironies, allowance must be made for the fact that Harcourt is pursuing a conquest and merely saying what is expedient to triumph over Alithea's resistance. But even if such is the case, Wycherley exposes the weakness of Harcourt's rakish code against the force of true love by effecting a total reversal in the end, when the consummate rake, presumably capable of exploiting the female for his own depraved pleasure, surrenders to Alithea's doctrine for husbands:

Lucy. And any wild thing grows but the more fierce and hungry for being kept up, and more dangerous to the Keeper.

Alith. There's doctrine for all Husbands Mr. Harcourt.

Harc. I edifie Madam so much, that I am impatient till I am one.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 21.    <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

This response should remove any doubts as to Harcourt's abandonment of the code of the gallant.

If Harcourt must learn that love makes its own demands, so must Alithea of course. Alithea by a fortunate turn of circumstances manages to have the man she truly loves without forfeiting her expectation of the freedom that non-jealousy assures her. But she can have both only by admitting openly that she loves Harcourt, which requires that she abandon her excessive loyalty to Sparkish after discovering that his unremitting stupidity is the basis of all his behavior.

The conflict between love of Harcourt on the one hand and the dual loyalty to Sparkish's offer of marriage and the principle of non-jealousy on the other, can be traced through four scenes. The first step in the eventual rupture with Sparkish occurs in Act III; this step is brought about by the wit of Harcourt. Sparkish is catechizing Harcourt in order to allow the latter to demonstrate the innocence of his love for Alithea:

Spark. But how do you love her?

Har. With all my Soul.

Alith. I thank him, methinks he speaks plain enough now.

Spark. You are out still [to Alithea.

But with what kind of love, Harcourt?

Har. With the best, and truest love in the World.

Spark. Look you there then, that is with no matrimonial love, I'm sure.

Alith. How's that, do you say matrimonial love is not best?

Spark. God, I went too far e're I was aware. . . .<sup>19</sup>

Alithea is momentarily shocked to discover that Sparkish apparently does not live by her equation of love and marriage. Clearly, for the audience, Harcourt has already proven himself a superior lover, for he has committed himself to marriage in order to prove his love, but as yet Alithea is not ready to accept him, for there is still her loyalty to Sparkish for his

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 43-44.

non-jealousy. That she loves Harcourt is more clear in Act IV, the scene in which she prepares for her wedding:

Lucy. Nay, Madam, I would ask you the reason, why you wou'd banish poor Master Harcourt for ever from your sight? how cou'd you be so hard-hearted?

Alith. 'Twas because I was not hard-hearted.

Lucy. No, no; 'Twas stark love and kindness, I warrant.

Alith. It was so; I wou'd see him no more, because I love him.<sup>20</sup>

But rather than allow her inner feelings to destroy the supposedly honorable relationship she has built with Sparkish, Alithea rejects Harcourt even as he stands before her disguised as the parson in a desperate attempt to win "a reprieve for a day only."<sup>21</sup> At the scene of the wedding Alithea expresses emphatic determination to carry out her intention of marrying Sparkish:

Alith. I have no more patience left, let us make once an end of this troublesome Love, I say.

Har. So be it, Seraphick Lady, when your Honour shall think it meet, and convenient so to do.

Spark. Gad I'm sure none but a Chaplain cou'd speak so, I think.

Alith. Let me tell you Sir, this dull trick will not serve your turn, though you delay our marriage, you shall not hinder it.<sup>22</sup>

Fortunately the combination of Harcourt's wit and resourcefulness and Sparkish's stupidity save Alithea from enduring the consequences of her obstinacy. But it is not until Sparkish reveals his inadequacy by her criterion of non-jealousy that Alithea is prepared to accept the destiny which the coalescence of these factors has prepared for her. In Act V, having been told by Pinchwife that Alithea has written to Horner and visited him, Sparkish accosts Alithea:

Spark. Nay Madam, do not deny it, your Brother shew'd it [the letter, and told me likewise he left you at Horner's lodging to fetch a Parson to marry you to him, and I wish you joy Madam, joy, joy, and to him too much joy, and to myself more joy for not marrying you.

Alith. So I find my Brother would break off this Match, and I can

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 50-51.    <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 54.    <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

consent to 't, since I see this gentleman can be made jealous. O Lucy, by his rude usage and jealousie, he makes me almost afraid I am married to him, art thou sure 'twas Harcourt himself and no Parson that married us.<sup>23</sup>

Because Alithea's idea of love rests on an over-valuation of loyalty to form for its own sake and the irrational adherence to the principle of non-jealousy, the fulfillment of her desire for Harcourt must depend on the series of complications that ultimately reveals Sparkish's failure as a lover. Meantime, Harcourt, in his eagerness to marry, has proven himself worthy of her. Later he will again prove his worthiness in his willingness to accept her word that she is innocent of any amorous connection with Horner. At that point non-jealousy comes to mean true confidence and faith in the loved one rather than mere indifference. Thus in meeting Alithea's test of non-jealousy Harcourt exhibits an expanded and deepened meaning of the concept. The concept of non-jealousy as originally accepted by Alithea is inadequate, for it can be satisfied by Sparkish's indifference, an indifference exposed for what it truly is only under extreme circumstances. Similarly, Alithea's equation of love and marriage is inadequate, for marriage can result from many motives besides true love. In contrast to the inadequacies of the concept of non-jealousy and the equation of love and marriage as they operate in the relationship between Alithea and Sparkish, Wycherley, in the final scenes, represents the possibility of enduring fulfillment for Harcourt and Alithea guided by the same concepts but infused now with deep feeling for each other and supported by a mutual esteem. The concept of non-jealousy is, as I have stated previously, a tenet of the Restoration love ethos. The equation of love and marriage comes from traditional morality. What Wycherley demonstrates in

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

the love affair of Harcourt and Alithea is that neither of these values in themselves necessarily deserves adherence; as uncritically adopted principles they are dead and deadening. But for those who truly love they become alive and contribute to the lovers' fulfillment in each other. Wycherley's purpose, at least in this part of The Country Wife, is not to deride the traditional equation of love and marriage while recommending the Restoration tenet of non-jealousy. Nor is his purpose to do the converse. His purpose is to examine them both in the light of actual human feeling and to demonstrate once again that concepts and values, whatever their source, have no life when they are detached from sincere feeling.

Alithea and Harcourt seem to represent an effective compromise between extremes. Alithea gives up her unrealistic loyalty; Harcourt abandons his libertinism; together they find a mean between excessive idealism and excessive sensuality. When the main actions of the play are considered, those actions involving Horner, a somewhat different picture presents itself. The simplest way of identifying the thematic intimations in these actions would be to follow the lead of critics who accept Horner as the embodiment of all that is sensually indiscriminate and spiritually sterile. Being among the most outspoken of these critics, Bonomy Dobree offers a definite, unequivocal opinion as to Horner's significance within the play. His opinion is worth quoting in full:

Horner, the principal figure, takes a leaf out of the Eunuches of Terence, and declaring himself impotent, devotes himself to living up to his name. From this we get the whole gallery of Restoration figures--The jealous man who is proved wrong to be jealous; the trusting man who is a fool to be so trusting; the light ladies concerned for their honour; the gay sparks devoted only to their pleasure; the ignorant woman seduced; the woman of common sense baffled--the only triumphant figure Horner himself, the type of all that is most unselectively lecherous, and who seems to derive such a sorry enjoyment from his success. We never laugh at Horner, just just as we never laugh at Tartuffe, though we may on occasion laugh

with each of them. Both are grim, nightmare figures, dominating the helpless, hopeless apes who call themselves civilized men.<sup>24</sup>

Dobree's point that Horner dominates the "apes who call themselves civilized men" is well taken, providing one is careful not to extend the idea of Horner's domination to the "civilized" woman as well. It is also true, as Mr. Dobree implies, that Horner stands apart from the "whole gallery of Restoration figures," though one can find reasons for his alienation from these social types less mystical than those discovered by Dobree, who, further on in the passage just quoted, identifies Horner as an automaton "animated by devils."<sup>25</sup> These qualifications aside, the observations of Mr. Dobree are useful as a starting point in an analysis of Wycherley's representation of love as conceived and practiced by Harry Horner. The two significant observations, that Horner stands apart and that he triumphs, will guide the analysis. Dobree's opinion that Horner derives "sorry enjoyment from his success" and that he is a "grim nightmare figure" will be found only partially applicable to the plot line which puts Horner among Lady Fidget, Squeamish and the other matrons. But a consideration of this line of action must be deferred until there has been an opportunity to explore Wycherley's meaning in the Horner-Margery-Pinchwife line of action.

That Horner stands apart from the social code which directs the conduct of Sparkish, Pinchwife and Jaspar Fidget is apparent from the very fact that he chooses to assume the position of a eunuch in society. Nothing is as sacred to these men as reputation, but here is Horner giving up his reputation as a successful libertine and assuming all the ignominy that comes with public knowledge of one's sexual incapacity. There are hints that

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<sup>24</sup>Restoration Comedy (London, 1966), p. 94.    <sup>25</sup>Ibid.

Jaspar Fidget, and possibly Sparkish and Pinchwife too, are very close to being as impotent as Horner pretends to be. Lady Fidget's song in Act V indicates that the male half of her society has long since substituted the pleasures of the bottle for those of the bed.<sup>26</sup> But it would be unthinkable for any of these men to do anything but pretend to be as stalwart and as rakish as Horner reputedly has been. In accepting the shame attached to his feigned disability, Horner demonstrates a singleness of purpose, a concentration on the object of his desires that allows no room for considerations of reputation. He repudiates that which is of primary value to the other men and in doing so discloses what is of primary value to him; namely, sexual conquest. The pleasure of Jaspar Fidget, of Sparkish and of Pinchwife comes from legal possession of their women, which brings with it the reputation of respectability which they all crave. So long as Lady Fidget, for example, maintains her "reputation", that is her esteem in the eyes of other people, Sir Jaspar is content even though her actual conduct may be no better than it should be. Horner obviously does not care a fig for reputation, or he would not sacrifice his own in order to increase his opportunities for sexual conquest. Horner is indeed a unique man.

But Horner's uniqueness of character is only one factor in his success with Margery Pinchwife, and perhaps not the most important one at that. Another factor, one that indicates a unity of satiric purpose in the strands of the plot, is the stupidity of Pinchwife. So imperceptive and dull is he beneath his show of cynical distrust that in the process of forbidding Margery to enjoy the pleasures of the Town he whets her appetite

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<sup>26</sup>Summers, pp. 78-79.

for them. Specifically, he arouses her interest in Horner himself while giving the audience yet another indication of Horner's reputation for vice:

Mr. Pin. . . . The Gallants may like you.

Mrs. Pin. What a homely Country Girl? no, bud, no body will like me.

Mr. Pin. I tell you, yes, they may.

Mrs. Pin. No, no, you jest--I won't believe you, I will go.  
to the theatre.

Mr. Pin. I tell you tho, that one of the lewdest Fellows in Town, who saw you there, told me he was in love with you.

Mrs. Pin. Indeed, who, who, pray who was't?

Mr. Pin. I've gone too far, and slipt before I was aware; how overjoy'd she is! [Aside.<sup>27</sup>

At this point, Margery's interest is not in Horner himself but in the fact that she has succeeded in attracting the attention of an experienced man of the Town. Her excitement is without abatement, and the more Pinchwife demands of her the "simplicity" he expects, the more she will desire opportunities to plunge into the life of the Town in order to prove herself equal to the compliment of Horner's interest in her. It is important that Pinchwife does not know of Horner's pretended affliction, because his knowledge would immediately remove the obstacles on the path of Margery's desires and thus obviate the dramatization of her ingenuity at achieving her ends. It is this dramatization that reveals the persistence and passion of Margery. These qualities of her character make her a fitting mistress for Horner, for in their intensity they match the cunning and sensuality usually ascribed to him. Coupled with her openness of expression, these characteristics give Margery a complexity beyond that of the more sophisticated women. At the same time they prove most inopportune for they lead Margery into a tryst with Horner at a time when he is least able to cover his actions with deceptions. Fortunately, Horner's pose as a eunuch saves him from exposure and helps save the play for comedy. Ultimately, it is

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 24.



Pinchwife's willingness to believe Sir Jaspar's testimony of Horner's impotence that prevents Pinchwife from acting on his well-founded suspicions of an affair between Horner and Margery. Thus everything in Margery's character conspires to bring into the open her desire for Horner before their affair and a revelation of their affair after it has occurred. Everything in Horner's character conspires to bring the affair about but to keep it clandestine.

A study of the complications of the Horner-Margery plot line reveals yet another level of sexual love, distinct from that implicit in the Alithea-Harcourt episodes, and it indicates another set of comments from the playwright which must be added to those deduced from his dramatization of the courtship of Harcourt and Alithea. At first, when Margery's interest in the theatre is aroused by the news that a gallant loves her, it seems she is activated by an indiscriminating excitement. Representing her as merely promiscuously sensual, Wycherley could have accomplished one of his intentions for her character. He could have used her simply as an example of forthright female lust, which would refreshingly contrast to the extreme hypocrisy of Lady Fidget and the egregious rectitude of Alithea. Indeed one of Margery's functions seems to be to represent the natural sexual instinct neither fettered nor sublimated by the demands of social conventions; she exhibits those impulses common to all men and women and capable of finding their own harmless gratification--if they are not warped by misplaced notions of virtue. Perhaps this is what F. W. Bateson has in mind when he places Margery in opposition to Horner and calls her "the primitive country girl, who stands for the ordinary human decencies."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>"L. C. Knights and Restoration Comedy," Restoration Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. John Loftis (New York, 1966), p. 31.

But several scenes, among them the letter writing scene to which I have previously referred, would seem to cast doubt on this interpretation of Margery. Moreover, it seems clear that only at first is it the simple, unrestrained impulse of the female libido that moves Margery to blurt out her joy at being desired by a gallant. This rather undifferentiated impulse becomes complicated, as previous discussion has indicated, by the foolish attempt of Pinchwife to suppress Margery's interest. P. F. Vernon is quite correct in stating that:

As for Pinchwife, every effort he makes to keep his wife in ignorance only helps to teach her what he wishes to conceal. The situation is rich in irony. The very simplicity of his wife, the quality for which he married her, leaves him completely helpless.<sup>29</sup>

But another complicating factor, which has been insufficiently considered by critics, deserves attention. That factor is the appeal of Horner himself, not Horner the anonymous, mysterious, lewd gallant, whom Pinchwife mentions to Margery, but Horner the flesh-and-blood man whom Margery actually meets and to whom she is powerfully attracted. Margery may exhibit a candid, generalized sensuality, especially in Act II but she also develops a specific attachment to Horner, and it is this specific attachment that inspires her to the acts of ingenuity by which she ultimately gains her objective. There is nothing in Wycherley's psychology of women to necessitate Margery's active execution of her design except the existence of definite desire for the individual whom she has selected. As Caution in The Gentleman Dancing Master has made clear, a woman who is not averse to indulging herself in erotic fantasies, can do very well without men. But knowing that there is a particular man interested in her, Margery could not, of course, be satisfied with Caution's compromise. And after meeting

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<sup>29</sup>William Wycherley (London, 1965), p. 26.

Horner she is even less able to accept the conditions forced on her by Pinchwife. All this becomes clear in Act III when Margery and Horner meet for the first time, she in disguise as a boy, he of course posing as a eunuch, though without Pinchwife's knowledge. The meeting of the two is marvelously comic on many levels:

Hor. How now Pinchwife?

Mr. Pin. Your Servant.

Hor. What, I see a little time in the Country makes a Man turn wild and unsociable, and only fit to converse with his Horses, Dogs, and his Herds.

Mr. Pin. I have business, Sir; and must mind it; your business is pleasure, therefore you and I must go different ways.

Hor. Well, you may go on, but this pretty young Gentleman----  
[takes hold of Mrs. Pinchwife.

Har. The Lady-- [Alithea

Dor. And the maid-- [Lucy

Hor. Shall stay with us, for I suppose their business is the same with ours, pleasure.

Mr. Pin. 'Sdeath he knows her, she carries it so sillily, yet if he does not, I shou'd be more silly to discover it first [Aside.

Alith. Pray, let us go, Sir.

Mr. Pin. Come, come--

Hor. Had you not rather stay with us [to Mrs. Pinchwife.

Prithce Pinchwife who is this pretty Gentleman?

Mr. Pin. One to whom I'm a guardian. I wish I could keep her out of your hands---- [Aside.

Hor. Who is he? I never saw anything so pretty in all my life.

Mr. Pin. Pshaw, do not look upon him so much, he's a poor bashful youth, you'll put him out of countenance. Come away Brother.  
[offers to take her away.

Hor. O your brother.

Mr. Pin. Yes, my wife's Brother; come, come, she'll stay supper for us.

Hor. I thought so, for he is very like her I saw you at the Play with, whom I told you, I was in love with.

Mrs. Pin. O Jeminy! is that he that was in love with me, I am glad on 't I vow, for he's a curious fine Gentleman, and I love him already too [Aside.

Is this he Bud?<sup>30</sup>

Horner's behavior in this scene offers two possibilities for interpretation. The first is that Horner is deceived by the disguise, in which case his lewdness would extend to perversion. The second is that Horner sees

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<sup>30</sup>Summers, pp. 45-56.

through the disguise. The second is more probable. For one thing, pinchwife's complaint that Margery "carries it so sillily" seems to be no less than a stage direction instructing the actress to subvert the disguise by means of her gestures and facial expressions. If Margery were actually doing this it would transmit to Horner the fact that she is not really a boy at all. Secondly, the implication of bi-sexuality in Horner's compliments to the disguised Margery (and later in his kissing of her) contribute nothing to Wycherley's intention either to satirize Pinchwife or to examine the course of a certain kind of love. On the other hand, the assumption that Horner is aware of the disguise provides rich dramatic irony, for in the course of overtly accepting as fact the deception wrought by Pinchwife, Horner is actually making love to Mrs. Pinchwife, the very thing the deception was supposed to prevent. For the irony to be complete the audience must sense that Horner knows it is Margery, and not her pretty brother, to whom he is paying his compliments. The satire within the scene continues Wycherley's attack on the whole society represented by Sir Jaspar and Pinchwife, and Pinchwife's assertion that Horner's business is pleasure recalls Sir Jaspar's quip at the end of Act II, after he has put his wife into the hands of Horner.<sup>31</sup> In the minds of Sir Jaspar and Pinchwife, pleasure and business are opposed to each other, just as are the Town and marriage. In their pursuit of business, in their dull insistence upon duty, and in their desire for respectability they exclude all pleasure, even love, which can be an ennobling pleasure. Obviously, Pinchwife is not here equating pleasure with love, but only with erotic dalliance. And Horner himself has the same thing in mind when he tries to persuade the

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<sup>31</sup>Summers, p. 34.

girls to stay. It is the pleasures of the Town of which he is thinking.

Margery's apparent reluctance to leave with Pinchwife is consistent with the evidence that she is not acting in conformity with her disguise. Her motivation consists of the general desire to enjoy the pleasures alluded to by Horner, in contrast to which Pinchwife's dogged possessiveness must seem a terrible bore. But she seems also motivated by a specific attraction to Horner. The news that she is the one whom he loves transports her. Her satisfaction at discovering that Horner is the very man of whom she has been told, her praise of him and her frank admission that she loves him--all of them composing her first speech after meeting Horner--attest the fact that she has fallen in love with him virtually on sight. Thus Horner is more than the fascinating epitome of that alluring Town for which Margery yearns but which remains unreachable. He is an individual man whose appearance and manner so overtake her that she ignores all the restraints of social decorum, of feminine coyness, and of personal pride in order to confess her love immediately. Of course the confession is to the audience, in an aside, not to her husband. But her eagerness is enough to convince Pinchwife of her amorous feelings for Horner. That she settles her desire on Horner is important, for it endows her with an individuality implied by the power of choice. Indeed this power of choice becomes important at the play's conclusion because it cuts in two directions. In one sense, the choice of Horner as a lover is intuitively sound, because he proves capable of acting much more honorably than his reputation would have led one to expect. On the other hand, Margery's choice is gravely misplaced, for Horner refuses to openly defy convention and claim Margery against the prior, legal--but unloving--claim of Pinchwife. As the scene of the meeting progresses both Harcourt and Dorilant flatter Margery-in-disguise

and insinuate that as a boy she is more desirable than many women. Besides sustaining the dramatic irony, these speeches remind the audience that in asserting her love for Horner Margery actually is being selective, exercising a choice and not being propelled blindly into the orbit of the arch Town-gallant. In indicating that Margery does exercise choice, Wycherley reinforces the pattern of indications that Horner is an extraordinary man. It is not merely what he represents--Harcourt and Dorilant also represent that--but how his presence actually affects Margery that win her to him. But Wycherley is doing more than just this. He is adding depth to Margery's character and in so doing offering a new way to look at love. Pinchwife has made the error of equating ignorance with innocence. He has confronted Margery with an impossible choice: "If you love me," he has said, "you must hate London."<sup>32</sup> Margery's behavior toward Horner demonstrates that love of a man can be consonant with love of the Town. The two loves do not exclude each other, providing the man is the right man. This reconciliation of opposed values is analogous to the reconciliation of experience and love achieved by Alithea and Harcourt in their love.

Besides the two components, love of Horner and love of the Town, that make up Margery's motivations, there is the native shrewdness and guile of her character. In her ignorance she proves more adept at intrigue and subterfuge than does Alithea in her knowledge. And so the love of Margery for Horner effects the same reconciliation of love for a man and love for the Town as does the love of Alithea for Harcourt, but it adds to this reconciliation the element of shrewdness so seemingly incongruous with the surface simplicity of Margery's character. Margery expresses her love

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

openly, because she lacks the acquired coyness by which a woman would disguise her vulnerability and maneuver herself into favorable relationships with men. Believing Horner to be as susceptible to amorous feelings as she is, she exercises her native guile to bring about a liaison with him. The difference between her character and Alithea's is momentous. Alithea is capable of admitting love, but refrains from doing so, indeed deliberately sends Harcourt away so that she will not be induced into admitting her love. Alithea holds her lovers up to a rigorous, albeit a somewhat foolish, condition. She forces on a lover the necessity to meet her standard. When he manifests jealousy Sparkish fails to meet that standard and is immediately rejected. But for Margery, there is no condition. She requires only attention and a show of interest. Fortunately, Horner proves able to give even more, for in the end he gives his protection and saves her honor. But even this acts against Margery's deepest hopes and succeeds only in throwing her back into the detested life from which she has briefly escaped. Margery has all the potential of an accomplished Town woman and needs only the lesson of a disappointment in love to make her more chary, less frank and more protective of her own feelings and interests. But in the end Horner deprives her of a chance to realize that potential.

At the end of the play, Pinchwife reluctantly accepts the testimony of Margery's innocence and she reluctantly accepts her place:

Mr. Pin. But I must be one--[a husband] against my will to a Country-Wife, with a Country-murrain to me.

Mrs. Pin. And I must be a Country Wife still too I find, for I can't, like a City one, be rid of my musty Husband, and do what I list [Aside.

Hor. Now, Sir, I must pronounce your Wife innocent, though I blush whilst I do it, and I am the only Man by her now expos'd to shame; which I will straight down in Wine. . . .

Lucy. Indeed, she's innocent, Sir, I am her witness, and her end of coming out was, but to see her Sister's Wedding, and what she has said to your face of her love to Mr. Horner was, but the usual

innocent revenge on a Husband's jealousy, was it not, Madam  
 speak--

Mrs. Pin. Since you'll have me tell more lyes--

[Aside to Lucy and  
 Horner.]

Yes, indeed, Budd.<sup>33</sup>

Margery complies with the demand for duplicity. It is significant that Horner speaks before Lucy urges assent from Margery, for it seems apparent that Horner's words seal the fate of Margery and leave her no choice. Previously he had concealed their affair, thus protecting her honor. She preferred admitting the affair and accepting the disgrace such an admission would bring, because she believed Horner loved her. She was able to get only as far as confessing her love for Horner, which Lucy manages subsequently to represent as only a piece of verbal revenge on Pinchwife. Now Horner is saying in effect that he prefers the shame of being thought a eunuch to the prospect of admitting the truth and facing the wrath of Pinchwife and the prospect of becoming Margery's protector after her almost certain banishment for adultery. Horner's speech brings on the disillusionment of Margery. Having employed her own skills at deception in order to enjoy the company of the man she loves, she must witness his persistence at deception in order to save himself from openly admitting any love for her. Since Margery would desire nothing more than an open admission, and both Horner and Lucy know this, his continued deception of her husband can mean only one thing: He does not love her enough to claim her. Were it not for Pinchwife's previously disclosed intention of returning to the country, Margery's disappointment in Horner could be the beginning of a more cautious, more sober, less naive involvement with love and with the Town. But as it is, the disillusionment of her first love can be only a memory, bitter at

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 87.



first, perhaps becoming bittersweet in time. The final scene of the play is full of pathos as well as comedy, because Margery must surrender her claim on Horner. She must relinquish her desire for the Town, for which she has such a lively taste and for which her chastening experience with Horner has educated her. She must suppress her native candor and tell a lie. And all this must be done so that she can return to a "musty Husband" and a dull life in the country. In every way Margery loses in the end.

In the representation of Margery's love for Horner, we note a definite shift in Wycherley's perspective on a certain type of love. Previously Wycherley had examined the effect of female love on male egoism and shown that the male must ultimately yield. In Love in a Wood Ranger yields to the love of Lydia, which love, incidentally, is promoted by female guile. In The Gentleman Dancing Master, Gerrard yields to the combination of innocence and guile that marks the love of Hippolita. However, in The Country Wife, Horner does not yield to Margery's love, though Margery follows precisely the same pattern as do her counterparts in earlier plays. Like them she employs her shrewdness to effect a liaison with her lover. But in her case the liaison proceeds to sexual intercourse. In trusting to Horner's love for her, she enters a relationship for the mutual pleasure of love, failing to realize that immediate sensual pleasure is Horner's sole object. For Horner love lasts only as long as the sensual pleasure. Hippolita would never have made Margery's miscalculation. Margery's loss is great and Wycherley has, for the first time, punished with loss one of his attractive heroines. This punishment results not from the character's inadequacies, for if anything, Margery in her candor and simplicity is a more attractive character than her counterparts in the earlier plays. The punishment results from the single-mindedness and

callousness of the male. Horner, unlike his counterparts, Ranger and Gerrard, lives his code unremittingly. For them love is a game only until their happiness is at stake. Both Ranger and Gerrard show that they can suffer when threatened with loss of love. Horner, on the other hand, would probably suffer when faced with the actual presence of love. To Horner, love such as Margery's is alien and possibly disquieting, and so he prefers to forfeit his opportunity to enjoy her love and to continue instead in his deception in order to indulge his lust. In the process, of course, he violates the naivete of Margery and causes her to suffer. But Wycherley has given her one small consolation. She has had the pleasure of Horner's embraces. Thus in a very literal sense, Margery possesses the truth. Perhaps her final acquiescence to Lucy's demand for a lie can be read as an act of sacrifice for Horner, an act which further beautifies the pathos of her character by adding to it the ability to transform something sordid into something fine.

Whether we consider the affair of Margery and Horner from the standpoint of Margery's complexity of character or from the standpoint of Horner's single-mindedness, we are struck with the fact that Wycherley has gone far beyond the uses to which he had previously put similar materials. The characters are much more arresting than their counterparts in earlier plays. And the themes are more intricately wrought. For instance, the theme of simplicity becomes involved in the interactions of the two characters in such a way as to reveal itself under one aspect in Margery early in the play and under another aspect in Horner later in the play. By conventional, civilized criteria Margery is the simple character, untutored and without social learning of any kind. Her actions belie this characterization, and she proves to be complex. By the same criteria, Horner is complex, i. e.

polished, socially skillful. But ultimately his action, especially his refusal to accept Margery's proffered love, reveal him to be very simple in actuality. All his surface variegation conceals a single motive. Socially Margery is simple and Horner is complex. But in the constitution of their characters it is the reverse. Because of the change of perspective which adds pathos to comedy and disappointment to the resolution accepted by the most attractive character, the question might arise whether Wycherley was moved by any specific motive. Did something in his life at the time of composition urge him towards this new treatment of the love affair between the innocent female and the rake, which had occupied him in his earlier plays? It seems the answer must be no. Nothing in the biographies or letters of Wycherley indicate any personal reasons behind this new perspective on love. And since less than three years had elapsed since The Gentleman Dancing Master, the change can hardly be attributed merely to age. It seems that what Wycherley has done has been to take a situation and examine it from different angles and under different lights. "What would happen," he may have asked, "if I were to take a character like Ranger or Gerrard and completely divest him of any susceptibility to love? What would happen if I were to take a girl almost as sheltered as Hippolita only without Hippolita's protective instincts and allowed her to fall in love with the rake?" What would happen, of course, is precisely what does happen between Margery and Horner in The Country Wife. In representing their love affair and in bringing it to a conclusion consistent with their characters, Wycherley was doing what other men of his day were doing. He was attempting to expose reality as it actually existed, to observe truth, in its various manifestations, without prejudice.

I have argued that Wycherley carried the skepticism of his day even

beyond the point of deflating conventions and used it to deflate the skeptics themselves by showing that modern substitutes for time-worn conventions were no more immune from criticism than were the practices they sought to replace. If Wycherley could adopt the attitude of skepticism in his satire, certainly he could adopt the perspective of a scientist in his examination of love. And this, I submit, is what he did. It is not merely in the content of his plays that Wycherley shows the influences of the Restoration love ethos. It is also in the methods he adopts for representing the content. Horner is a product of these new concepts. He believes that truths are relative, that love consists of titillation, that reality is wholly material, that knowledge is sure only when it is sensuous. Wycherley's presentation of Horner reveals two distinct flaws in that point-of-view. First, it victimizes those who are not prepared to use the theory to rationalize selfishness or who have no selfishness to rationalize. Second, it deprives its holder of meaning which may lie beyond the narrow materialistic and sensuous limits he has set on human experience. Horner confirms Hobbes's idea of human nature, not necessarily because he represents human nature as discovered in most people but because he makes himself less than human. Thus through the content of his representation, Wycherley exposes weaknesses in the Restoration love ethos. But in allowing the Horner-Margery plot line to run its course and to culminate as it does in the punishment of Margery and in Horner's continued deception, Wycherley seems to be putting into practice the dogmas of the relativity of truth, of the value of objectivity, and of the non-normative character of reality which infuse the very concepts he is holding up for critical scrutiny.

A more experienced Margery Pinchwife would have recognized the hedonistic premise governing the relationship between her and Horner. In

a society placing a high premium on respectability and pride, such a premise requires an acceptance of hypocrisy by all who would enjoy the pleasures of love solely according to the limits of the pleasure principle. Being unfamiliar with the rules of the game, Margery becomes a victim both of the severe consequences of hedonism and also of her own imprudence born of strong feeling and simple trust. Ironically, in the end Margery must herself embrace hypocrisy, albeit unwillingly, so that the game can continue for those more adept at it than she. Among those is Lady Fidget and her retinue of spoiled matrons. In Lady Fidget's relations with Horner, Wycherley depicts the kind of love that exists for pleasure alone, that is devoid of romance, hope and loyalty. It is the love perfectly appropriate to the characters of Horner and Lady Fidget, for it exists only on the basis of the deception required to maintain the appearance of respectability. The accomplished hypocrisy of Lady Fidget, which is perhaps equally responsible with Horner's deception for assuring a continuous "arrangement" between her and Horner seems to qualify her as a co-conspirator with Horner against the dupes, both of the vicious and of the foolish variety. Such a view of her character would require a reconsideration of those readings of the play which emphasize Horner's intellectual and sexual domination of the other characters. Typical of this kind of interpretation is the following passage from John Harrington Smith's book, The Gay Couple in Restoration

Comedy:

As the possessor of intellectual power sufficient to contrive such an engine as this [the pretence of impotence], Horner was immeasurably superior to any hero in comedy yet seen on the Restoration stage. Previously writers had put into their comedies gay young blades to whom they and the audience could feel a certain superiority. Wycherley endowed Horner not only with his own intellectual power and wit, but his own scorn of feminine looseness. . . and masculine inadequacy. . . In these later qualities Wycherley's successors could not imitate him. But they could and did imitate Horner as a maker of cuckolds and

successful anti-matrimonialists--for it should be noted that Horner does not figure in a love game, but is a free gallant, subject to no feminine control and acknowledging none.<sup>34</sup>

Later on Smith asserts that "wycherley's purpose is "to expose vice and folly."<sup>35</sup>

Interpretations such as this attribute satirical motives to Wycherley while denying that the satire extends to his chief creation. In effect they tend to equate Wycherley's values with Horner's. But Wycherley's values cannot be that easily known from biographical data, and the evidence of the plays suggests that he was perhaps more interested in permitting values to emerge from the actions he represented on the stage than he was in creating characters to be spokesmen or representatives of values. As a practitioner of a code influenced by the Restoration love ethos, Horner could not very well represent Wycherley's ultimate point of view, for Wycherley has taken pains to expose the inadequacies of that ethos. As the analysis of the Horner-Margery affair I believe demonstrates, he had also attempted to indicate that Horner could be a "maker of cuckolds and successful anti-matrimonialist" only by paying the very high price of repudiating his one opportunity to enjoy genuine love. I believe, further, that a review of Horner's affair with Lady Pinchwife will reveal that Horner is not all that free from a love game, nor perhaps is he totally free from feminine control.

That antagonism provides a large share of the impetus behind both Lady Fidget and Horner cannot be denied. How much of the antagonism is genuine and how much feigned is indicated at the first meeting of the two. It is shortly after the opening of Act I and Sir Jaspar, accompanied by Lady Fidget and Mrs. Daynty Fidget, pays Horner a visit:

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<sup>34</sup>(Cambridge, Mass., 1948), pp. 87-88.    <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

Sir Jas. My Lady, and Sister, Sir.--Wife this is Master Horner.

Lad. Fid. Master Horner, Husband!

Sir Jas. My Lady, my Lady Fidget, Sir.

Hor. So, Sir.

Sir Jas. Won't you be acquainted with her Sir? (So the report [of Horner's impotence] is true, I find by his coldness or aversion to the Sex; but I'll play the wag with him.) [Aside. Pray salute my Wife, My Lady, Sir.

Hor. I will kiss no Man's Wife, Sir, for him, Sir; I have taken my eternal leave, Sir, of the sex already, Sir.

Sir Jas. Hah, hah, hah; I'll plague him yet. [Aside. not know my Wife, Sir?

Hor. I do know your wife, Sir. She's a Woman, Sir, and consequently a Monster, Sir, a greater Monster than a Husband, Sir.<sup>36</sup>

It is difficult to believe that Horner is not savoring the opportunity to insult Lady Fidget under cover of his recently acquired aversion to women. His imprecations against women reveal that his former love affairs have not increased his respect for women. This speech along with subsequent dialogue between Horner and Quack demonstrate a misogynistic streak in Horner, which is served in two ways by his pretense. First, of course, he can revile women openly as the cause of his disablement. Second, he can use the public's acceptance of his lie as a means of adding to his amorous conquests. This all becomes exposed when he and Quack are alone after the departure of the Fidgets:

Qu. Nay, by this means you may be more acquainted with the Husbands, but the less with the Wives.

Hor. Let me alone, if I can but abuse the Husbands, I'll soon disabuse the Wives: Stay--I'll reckon you up the advantages, I am like to have by my Stratagem: First, I shall be rid of all my old Acquaintances, the most insatiable sorts of Duns, that invade our Lodgings in a morning: And next to the pleasure of making a new Mistress, is that of being rid of an old One, and of all old Debts; Love when it comes to be so, is paid the most unwillingly.<sup>37</sup>

Explicitly Horner describes his stratagem. Implicitly he indicates his creed: All value lies in freshness of experience. And the corollary is that no sexual relationship can be of permanent value. It exhausts its value

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<sup>36</sup>Summers, p. 12.    <sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

when the physical pleasure is gone. This cynicism becomes focused specifically on Lady Fidget, because she is a member of that class of women whom Horner particularly holds in contempt, the "Women of Honour."

In defending his stratagem to Quack, Horner displays a calculating perception of the character of such women and simultaneously hints by his choice of images that he does regard his endeavors as no more than a game of pleasure, specifically a hunt, in which the most cunning hunter enjoys the pleasure of consuming the quarry:

Qu. Well, you may be rid of your old Acquaintances; but how will you get any new Ones?

Hor. Doctor, thou wilt never make a good chymist, thou art so incredulous and impatient; ask but all the young Fellows of the Town, if they do not lose more time like Huntsmen, in starting the game, than in running it down; one knows not where to find 'em, who will, or will not: Women of Quality are so civil, you can hardly distinguish love from good breeding, and a Man is often mistaken; but now I can be sure, she that shows an aversion to me loves the sport, as those Women that are gone, whom I warrant to be right: And then the next thing, is your Women of Honour, as you call 'em, are only chary of their reputations, not their Persons, and 'tis scandal they wou'd avoid, not Men: Now may I have, by the reputation of an Eunuch, the Priviledges of One; and be seen in a Ladies Chamber in a morning as early as her Husband; kiss Virgins before their Parents, or Lovers; and maybe in short the Pas par tout of the town. . . .<sup>38</sup>

It is apparent from Horner's stratagem and his words to Quack that the necessity to maintain "Honour," a necessity imposed by the society is simultaneously an obstacle and stimulus to sex. It is an obstacle because its precepts forbid open alliances between women of respectable backgrounds and men such as Horner. It is a stimulus, because it endows these women with the allure of forbidden fruit, thus activating Horner to strive to possess clandestinely what he cannot possess openly. In the process of strategizing to fulfill this desire, something happens to love and even to lust. They become excited by the thrill of deception and by subterfuge

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.



itself rather than by the object being pursued. Hence one should not be surprised that Horner can indicate malice toward Lady Fidget in one scene and make love to her in another. It is not the person of Lady Fidget that Horner desires. It is rather the enjoyment of a banned pleasure. Since Lady Fidget represents "Honour" to an extreme, the ban on her is great and the pleasure of circumventing it proportionally great.

To suggest that Horner is without lust is to falsify the dynamics of his relationship with Lady Fidget. But his lust can never convert itself into love, nor can it very well sustain itself, for it is directed not towards a human being capable of transforming and renewing it. It is directed toward a situation, and once the situation has been achieved, Horner has little interest in the person who shares it with him. Wycherley very cleverly draws attention to this fact by allowing two situations of Horner's contrivance to come into conflict in the final scenes of the play. Horner becomes literally caught between the situation of cuckolding Pinchwife and the situation of smudging Lady Fidget's "Honour." To complicate things, Wycherley shows Horner's desire to enjoy the situation in which he violates Lady Fidget's "Honour" challenged by Squeaminsh's and Daynty's desire to have their's violated. The desires of all three "women of honour" threaten definitely to get out of hand. Having entered a situation protected by Horner's reputation as a eunuch, they shed restraint, somewhat shocking even Horner as they introduce him to their duplicity.

The key scene for an understanding of this complex relationship between Horner and the Ladies as well as the social forces motivating them is in Act V. Horner, Lady Fidget, Squeamish and Daynty are seated in Horner's lodging drinking wine brought by the Ladies themselves. Horner's powerlessness to cope with the forces being set in operation is foreshadowed

by his distress at the uncereemonious entrance of the ladies. Without apology or announcement they barge into his apartment before he has been able to show Margery the way out. "A Pox," Horner exclaims, "they are come too soon."<sup>39</sup> After the ladies are seated, Lady Fidget, and not Horner, dominates the scene; she immediately sets the tone with an allusion to Horner's feigned affliction: ". . . we trust you as much as our women."<sup>40</sup> Candor becomes the order of the day and candor permeates the song of Lady Fidget:

Why should our damned Tyrants oblige us to live.  
On the pittance of Pleasure which they only give.<sup>40</sup>

This complaint against the domination of the husbands expresses the motivation behind Mrs. Fidget's interest in Horner. As a eunuch he can become the victim of her vindictiveness towards all men; as a lover he can become the partner in her vindictiveness when she directs it towards her husband. If in the battle of the sexes, men seem to enjoy tyrannical power, the song of Mrs. Fidget suggests that women are not submissive subjects. As the scene proceeds, Horner and his guests imbibe wine. In the exchange of toasts their speeches become more reckless and more coarse:

Lad. Fid. No, I never part with a Gallant, till I've try'd him.  
Dear Brimmer that mak'st our Husbands short sighted.  
Dayn. And our bashfull gallants bold.  
Squeam. And for want of a Gallant, the Butler lovely in our eyes,  
drink Eunuch.  
Lad. Fid. Drink thou representative of a Husband, damn a Husband.  
Hor. And an English Bawd, and a French Chirurgeon.  
Lad. Fid. Ay we have all reason to curse 'em.  
Hor. For my sake Ladies.  
Lad. Fid. No, for our own, for the first spoils all young gallants'  
industry.  
Dayn. And the others art makes 'em bold only with common women.  
Squeam. And rather run the hazard of a vile distemper amongst them,  
then of a denial amongst us.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 78.    <sup>40</sup>Ibid.    <sup>41</sup>Ibid.    <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

This dialogue begins jocularly enough with the flippant bravado of Lady Fidget. Daynty and Squeaminsh take their turn at boastfulness and all four, led by Lady Fidget, curse their husbands. The drinking of a toast seals an unwritten compact among the women. Their contempt for their husbands arises apparently from a desire common among them for gratification and sexual pleasure, even in violation of their marriage vows. It is evident that female lust, which they have been affirming, sweeps aside even the pretense of virtue when the barriers are down and they feel free to express themselves. However, with Horner's ironic toast to English bawds and French Chirurgeons a new note is added to the dialogue. From this point it seems that the antipathy of the women is directed not just at their foolish husbands, but at all men. The natural alliance of the women against the men, their self-centered sexuality, their obsessive vindictiveness are indicated by the fact that Lady Fidget joins in Horner's curse, though, as she emphasizes, not for his sake but for theirs. Though the situation seems to require that she at least pretend sympathy for Horner, in order to assist her pretense that she is convinced of his impotence, she ignores his problem completely, concentrating only on her needs. The other women are equally unconcerned for Horner, as indeed they would be for any man, for in their minds men are deserving of the worst that can happen to them. And this goes for all men, not only for husbands.

The attack on men extends explicitly to the young gallants who are spurred by bawds and chirurgeons to neglect married women of virtuous reputation and to pursue only whores. But implicitly the complaints are being aimed at the entire social code which is the work of men and is maintained presumably for their advantage. The women protest specifically against demands that married women maintain the reputation of virtue very

often at the cost of denying their sexual needs. In an exchange of dialogue shortly after the one just quoted, Horner admits that even he was frightened by the reputations of these ladies. Lady Fidget responds by boldly admitting, to the only man to whom she can be so open, the spuriousness of feminine virtue. In the process she also voices some obloquy against male hypocrisies:

Lad. Fid. Our Reputation, Lord! Why should you not think, that we women make use of our Reputation, as you men of yours, only to deceive the world with less suspicion; for virtue is like the State-man's Religion, the Quaker's Word, the Gamester's Oath, and the Great Man's Honour, but to cheat those that trust us.<sup>43</sup>

The dramatic situation in which this dialogue occurs has resulted from the schemes of Horner. This situation elicits the dialogue, which in becoming progressively more open and frank reveals the anti-male animus permeating the characters of the women. Their vitriolic complaints and scornful boasts have been encouraged by the implicit sympathy of Horner, who in his role as the casualty in the battle of the sexes no longer poses a threat to their reputations. His counterfeit impotence privileges him to be the only man to whom the women's dissatisfaction and contempt can be expressed. Their openness is directly related to his pretence. Yet, because he is still a man he must also serve as the victim of their hatred; his suffering may partially slake their thirst for vengeance. Their flagrant dismissal of his problem is the mark of their spite. The social cause of both the deep hostility against men and the ambiguous treatment of Horner is the double standard, which of course, underlies the necessity for Horner's trick in the first place. The double standard is satirized by the very situation, but also by the dialogue, especially Lady Fidget's speech on Reputation, in

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

which, through a series of apt analogies, Wycherley allows his character to direct his satirical weapons towards various types of hypocrisy, thereby suggesting that sexual hypocrisy is only one of several kinds encouraged by his society.

Despite the seriousness of Wycherley's attack on the double standard and its concomitant of sexual hypocrisy, the mood of this scene remains comic. Of course the bawdiness contributes much to this mood. But the mood, like the theme, is an inherent factor in the unity between situation, character and dialogue. In effect the comedy has been built into the situation. Its presence can be discerned in several levels of irony. First, there is the dramatic irony of the audience's knowledge of Horner's deceit. Added to this basic irony is the more particular one of Horner's concealment of Mrs. Pinchwife in the closet. Even this concealment, necessitated by the plot, is used to further illuminate the theme, in a comic way. Mrs. Pinchwife, who is not hypocritical, but open, must be hidden in order to maintain the appearances demanded by the double standard. Yet, ironically, the women who accept dissimulation and hypocrisy, albeit, grudgingly, as a fact of social existence imposed by the double standard are speaking with the utmost candor and openness. Finally, there is the irony in the existence of that very frankness which Mrs. Fidget is practicing, for it is encouraged by the pretense that Horner is a eunuch. But Mrs. Fidget knows full well that he is not. She has merely accepted the pretense that he is in order to secure her reputation, so that in the presence of her friends she can pretend to be without fear that Horner will implicate her in irreputable conduct. In her own mind her security rests not on Horner's condition but on her belief that he is exclusively her lover.

All of these elements making for comedy, as well as those making for

the powerful emergence of a dominating theme are fixed within the design of the Horner-Fidget relationship. They are implicit in the relationship of Horner to Mrs. Fidget and the other women, a relationship imposed on him by the need for sexual hypocrisy arising out of the existence of the double standard. The implicit elements of theme and mood become explicit when Horner attempts to use the relationship between him and the women to promote his own sexual advantage. His effort exposes the contradiction that Wycherley is interested in satirizing, because it operates by turning the masculine vanity and feminine resentment into a means of increasing Horner's opportunities for violating the sexual code which the other characters of the play, except Mrs. Pinchwife, profess to uphold but in reality despise. Thus, the lust and cunning of Horner bring about the plot situations which in turn reveal the folly of the sexual code manifested in the double standard. At the same time, Horner is caught by his very success between situations that actually curtail his freedom. Character, plot and satire are tightly bound into a powerful comment leveled against the social order and also against those who accept deception and fraud as their modes of survival within the social order.

The relation of Horner to Lady Fidget exposes a double deception. Both have had to live by deception to satisfy their sexual desires, yet paradoxically, those desires have been stimulated by the need for deception itself. From their habitual deception is derived the specific deception in which they are presently engaged. Lady Fidget must pretend not to know that Horner is fit, and Horner cannot allow Lady Fidget to guess that he has been sampling the delights of other women. As in some of Wycherley's earlier characters, there is a contradiction. The characters adopt deception and promiscuity as suitable modes of social relations, yet they are reluctant

to countenance these modes in anyone else. This inconsistency assists the comedy by means of which we are reminded that the problems of Horner and Lady Fidget are undeserving of sympathy. The fact that the audience is aware of Margery's concealed presence throughout the scene suggests that Wycherley intends also to remind the audience of the difference between Margery and Lady Fidget and perhaps to direct the audience's sympathies toward the former.

Of utmost importance to an understanding of the significance of Wycherley's representations of love is the fact that the three plot lines of The Country Wife reveal a distinction between true and false freedom. True freedom endows characters with genuine humanity. It consists of the capacity to give oneself without reference to external imperatives or without surrender to ungovernable internal compulsions. In this sense, Alithea and Harcourt are the most free, because through love they become liberated, Alithea from her false sense of loyalty, Harcourt from his libertine dogmatism. Margery is also free, for she is constrained by neither her marriage nor her foreknowledge of consequences. It is her freedom that makes her attractive despite her bad judgment. Horner and Lady Fidget are not free, for Horner becomes entrapped in his own contrivances to the extent that his efforts to enjoy love bring only the furtive pleasures of intrigue; his will to love and his ability to love remain damned up. Perhaps his posing as a eunuch is a bit of irony--Wycherley's way of symbolizing Horner's essential incapacity. Similarly, Lady Fidget can only indulge her lusts in the coarsest way, being unable to free her emotions from the unnatural stimulation caused by the stringent proscriptions on her freedom, in the name of "Honour." Through this distinction between true and false freedom Wycherley has brilliantly made a number of points touching the validity of the Restoration

love ethos. First he has shown that any social code, whether conventional or innovative, becomes perverse when it cripples sincere emotion. The social code of non-jealousy is not part of an outmoded set of traditions. It is an innovative code, an element of the Restoration love ethos. Yet Alithea's happiness and freedom are threatened just as severely by it as Margery's freedom and happiness are threatened by Pinchwife's old fashioned jealousy and possessiveness. In absolute terms, the Restoration love ethos proves no better than the traditional ideas it purports to supplant. To practice a sophisticated indifference and a polished show of cynicism is not necessarily to improve on the old fashioned possessiveness and jealousy. Of course, possessiveness and jealousy, absolutely speaking, are not preferable either. It depends on the depth and genuineness of the love within the characters, whether they will find happiness, and not on the social code they follow. Secondly, Wycherley has shown that men and women of extreme wit and intemperate passion can circumvent any social code and even add spice to their misconduct by the very act of flouting the code. Third, Wycherley has shown that the wits who live outside traditional moral conventions and to some extent represent the premises of the Restoration love ethos become so involved in their intrigues, deceptions and strategies of circumvention that they risk forfeiting the opportunity to experience genuine love. Thus, ironically, the exercise of wit, which the Restoration valued so highly and which is supposed to liberate the wits, in effect can imprison them.

The wit in question would be reflected in the love ethos informing the thought of Rochester and Sedley and in the private life of Charles II. In the character of Horner, Wycherley embodies this ethos and pushes his embodiment to an extreme. In doing so he exposes the fallacy of the ethos, which does not in itself liberate the man, but only provides him with a value



system more cynical and more materialistic than the old idealistic (Platonic) value system. True, the Restoration love ethos sanctions certain sexual pleasures that under Platonism would have been strictly forbidden. But the failure of Horner to respond to Margery's clear summons to responsible love, coupled with his self-reduction to a mere instrument for Lady Fidget's pleasure, demonstrate that to increase sexual pleasure is not necessarily to increase meaning. In The Country Wife, Wycherley demonstrates that he was no uncritical expounder of the new values. Nor was he an embittered conservative bent on preserving what remained of the old values. He was concerned principally with the emotions of people and with what happens to emotions when they are stultified by any code, old or new. He takes no definite position on either side of the controversy between materialism and idealism; both can be guilty of excess; neither deserves the place of an absolute value. The basis of the Restoration love ethos consisted of Hobbesian materialism, scientific rationality and skepticism. Working from this basis, Wycherley has examined the Restoration love ethos itself. A safe conclusion to be drawn from this examination would be that, while Wycherley, in The Country Wife, considers the Restoration love ethos no worse than the idealistic ethos which engendered possessiveness and jealousy, he does not consider it any better either.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PLAIN DEALER

In the last chapter I attempted to establish that operating from a basis of characterization Wycherley in The Country Wife had represented certain types of love which he had introduced in his earlier plays. The characterization itself clearly evolved out of characters he had created for the earlier plays, and the types of love represented could be traced to the treatments of love in the earlier plays. In The Country Wife both character and theme, however, have been subtilized and deepened. Ambiguity enters the action to give the comic incidents a tinge of pathos in the Margery and Horner plot line, and there is harsh irony in the Lady Fidget and Horner plot line. These developments demonstrate that Wycherley had obviously matured as a playwright since Love in a Wood. It is tempting to assert that The Plain Dealer follows naturally and inevitably this line toward a deeper study of the types of love. Certainly the anguish of Manly and the perfidy of Olivia betoken a severe realism, indeed an acid cynicism that would encourage the expectation of unstinting penetration into the pain of betrayed human love. To some extent the play fulfills this expectation. But the climax of the play, among other things, vitiates the power of the playwright to convey through his characters a well defined, bold representation of the tragic potentialities of love in his society. The Plain Dealer is indeed a remarkable play for its vitality and terror, but ultimately it seems somewhat anomalous among Wycherley's plays, for it does not bring the

reader into a fuller truth on the subject of love; it merely exposes a monstrous variant of a form of love already adumbrated in earlier plays. Moreover, the playwright intervenes to arrest the progress of action short of its logical conclusion. Briefly and specifically, one would expect Manly, in his situation, to become mad and destroy himself and Olivia. But that would be tragedy, and apparently Wycherley does not want that. Through the character of Fidelity he rescues Manly from the fate that his own obstinate character would seem to have allotted to him. Whether or not this rescue results in comedy is a moot point. It should be questioned, though, whether it results in great comedy, owing to the artificiality and arbitrariness in the characterization of Fidelity. Thus I would challenge the interpretation, for example, of John H. Wilson, who writes:

. . . Wycherley in his last play held up his characters against an ideal standard of human behavior, and rejected them all. In one play at least, he was a truly great satirist, and that play is a classic of its kind.<sup>1</sup>

To merely show that characters fail to live up to an ideal standard does not in itself make great satire; the standard should be both feasible and desirable. It can be shown that Manly's standard, while feasible, is immoderate, hence not desirable. And if Fidelity is to be considered as the standard then we are back to the unfeasible Platonic idealism reflected by Christina and apparently rejected by Wycherley. In introducing the paragon, Fidelity, Wycherley has ignored the skeptical, anti-idealistic premises which through his earlier plays have become progressively stronger. When skepticism and scientific detachment served him well in The Country Wife and, applied with equal courage to The Plain Dealer might have led to a tragic resolution, why has Wycherley not availed himself of them? There can be no certain answer

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<sup>1</sup>The Court Wits of the Restoration (Princeton, N.J., 1948), p. 167.

to this question, but an examination of the play should indicate that in the main plot Wycherley took the Hobbesian premise and the skeptical realism to a point so extreme that the power of skeptical analysis and detachment were inadequate to save the characters, the play, or perhaps Wycherley himself from the peril of collapse. Fidelity represents Wycherley's recoil from the ultimate implications of the world he has drawn on the pattern of Hobbesian materialism. The Plain Dealer is a remarkable play not so much because the author rejects the characters who fail to live up to his ideal standard but because in thrusting an ideal standard into the play in the first place the author intimates his desire to halt his own progress toward the representation of a fully materialistic world toward which he seems to have been advancing in his previous plays. In effect, The Plain Dealer not only holds up the Restoration love ethos for critical scrutiny; it condemns it utterly.

That Wycherley had arrived at a decision to directly attack the Restoration love ethos as practiced by the Town society is evidenced in the dedication of the play to Mother Bennet. According to Wycherley's tribute, Mother Bennet is the only woman who gives love generously and on an honest basis, for she has no concern for reputation. Men go to her when their "endeavors are discontenanc'd and refus'd, by the nice coy Women of Honour."<sup>2</sup> While Mother Bennet is not a connoisseur of wit, at least she allows the man of wit equal favor at her door, whereas the Women of Honour "hate a Man that knows 'em . . . and must have a blind easy Fool, whom they can lead by the Nose."<sup>3</sup> But of all Mother Bennet's claims to praise, the chief is that

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<sup>2</sup>Montague Summers (ed.), The Complete Works of William Wycherley, 4 vols., II, 97.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

she is not a hypocrite: "Whatsoever your amorous misadventures have been, none can charge you with that heinous, and worst of Women's Crimes, Hypocrisie."<sup>4</sup> Wycherley's view of things seems clear. There is no place in the Town for an honest man who happens to be a man of wit. Love does not exist among "women of honour"; even the prospect of an occasional Alithea seems to have become dimmed. By the standards that prevail in this depiction, honorable men of wit are outcasts and must seek companionship among the prostitutes in Mother Bennet's employ. In contemplating this pessimistic view of the possibilities for sexual love that is more than mere physical gratification, it is instructive to consider the role Wycherley gives to Eliza. As a confidante and counselor to Olivia, Eliza reminds one of Vincent. She resembles Vincent in her apparent virtue as well. But in her sophistication and familiarity with the Town she finds her closest counterpart in Alithea. The question arises, why has not Wycherley involved Eliza in a love affair? Why is there not a sub-plot using Eliza? The answer may very well be that Wycherley intended to remove every distraction from the stark reality of Manly's education. It would not be probable for Eliza to engage in anything but a virtuous and satisfying love. For Wycherley to allow her to become engaged in such a love affair would be to suggest that between the extremes of Olivia and Fidelia there is an alternative, a sophisticated, undeluded yet generous and passionate love. In the Alithea-Harcourt plot line in The Country Wife Wycherley was able to seriously entertain the possibility of such a love. For some reason or reasons on which one can only speculate, in The Plain Dealer, Wycherley is no longer able to do this and one finds the severest opposition between virtue and vice and

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

the starkest contrast between corruption and innocence he has produced as a playwright.

In the center of this opposition is Manly. It would be plausible to maintain that, like an allegorical figure, Manly represents a pure antithesis to the vices of the Town. But Manly's character is ambiguous and his behavior proves inconsistent with his own professions. It is Rose Zimbardo's opinion that Manly's character disintegrates and that, as the play progresses, "the satyr-like qualities of his private personality overwhelm the public personality of the courageous and fearless satirist."<sup>5</sup> This opinion seems beyond dispute, at least as regards the major transformations in Manly's character. However, even before Manly's inner rage and lust break through, there are signs that his blunt honesty and plain dealing do not necessarily betoken pure virtue, and one is even led to wonder whether Manly's fearlessness and courageousness exceed the limits required by the satire. We learn very early, for example, that Manly can be physically brutal, for near the beginning of Act I we see him kick a sailor out of his room.<sup>6</sup> Even earlier in Act I there is a rather revealing comic scene. Lord Plausible, whom Manly has just accused of being troublesome, is about to depart; Manly's accusation having had no apparent effect on him:

Man. If you have any [business], I wou'd not detain your Lordship.

L. Plaus. Detain me, dear Sir, I can never have enough of your company.

Man. But I see you won't [Aside.

L. Plaus. Your most faithful--

Man. God be w'ye, my Lord.

L. Plaus. Your most humble--

Man. Farewel.

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<sup>5</sup>"The Satiric Design in *The Plain Dealer*," *Restoration Dramatists: Twentieth Century Views*, ed. Earl Miner (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1966), p. 134.

<sup>6</sup>Summers, p. 109.

L. Plaus. And eternally--

Man. And eternally Ceremony--then the Devil take thee eternally.  
[Aside.]<sup>7</sup>

It is a small point but nonetheless telling: Manly casts his most insulting retorts in asides rather than directly toward Lord Plausible. This is not to suggest that Manly is being hypocritical. What is suggested is that not even Manly is exempt from certain minimal obligations of "ceremony," yet Manly proves, in his subsequent discussion with Freeman,<sup>8</sup> that he lacks the perspicuity to realize this. It is in his blind assumption that somehow he is beyond hypocrisy, tiresomeness and dishonor that Manly prefigures his descent into brutality and lust. In this early depiction of Manly Wycherley seems to be representing the pride that in tragedy invariably precedes the fall.

Given the early scenes of the play, it is reasonable to suspect that if Manly does represent Wycherley's idea of virtuous manhood it must not be for his plain dealing, for this has a tendency toward brutality and indiscriminateness. This suspicion gains credence from the fact that Olivia has been able to cheat Manly by simply mirroring his blunt disdain for the world. But when Olivia employs the art of plain dealing in her own interest, it becomes clear that in itself blunt honesty is not necessarily identical with virtue. In Act II, Manly bursts into an interview between Olivia, Plausible and Novel, the subject of which is his coarseness of manner. Rather than attempt an adroit evasion, Olivia directly attacks Manly with crude sarcasm:

Oliv. Then that noble Lyon-like meen of yours, that Soldier-like weather beaten complexion, and that manly roughness of your voice; how can they otherwise than charm us Women who hate effeminacy!

. . . . .  
And then that Captain-like carelessness in your dress, but especially your scarf; 'twas just such another, only a little higher ty'd, made

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 106.    <sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 109-112.

me in love with my Taylor as he past by my Window the last Training-day; for we Women adore a Martial Man, and you have nothing wanting to make you more one, or more agreeable, but a wooden leg.<sup>9</sup>

When plain dealing is turned against him Manly finds it unbearable. He storms out vowing to "despise, contemn, hate, loathe and detest" Olivia.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that plain dealing in itself is not a badge of virtue, yet it is also clear that Wycherley intends his audience to sympathize with Manly. What then sets Manly apart in a positive way if not his plain dealing? If the other attractive characters of Wycherley's plays are considered, the answer to this question is not difficult to find. Vincent, Christina, Hippolita and Margery all share one trait; namely, the capacity to love wholeheartedly and generously. With the exception of Vincent they are all passionate innocents. Like them, Manly lacks experience in the world. Like them he becomes fixated on a single love object for whom he is prepared to sacrifice anything. Like them he chooses for his loved one a person unworthy of his devotion and generosity. In The Plain Dealer Wycherley is composing a love plot identical in its basic elements to the love plots involving these passionate innocents, with the obvious difference that in The Plain Dealer his passionate innocent is a man. There are other less obvious differences which will be considered in the course of discussion. All of the differences between the affair of Manly and Olivia and the love plots of the earlier passionate innocents reveal the distance Wycherley has travelled down the path of disillusionment. His disillusionment of specific interest in his study is with the power of the Restoration love ethos to provide adequate constraints on human vice. The Plain Dealer seems clearly to signal Wycherley's final rejection of those ethical concepts which in

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 132.    <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 133.



earlier plays he had viewed appraisingly, skeptically but more or less with comic toleration.

It may seem incongruous to Manly's apparent age and obvious variety of experience to label him innocent. But the incongruity disappears when one considers the efforts of Manly to keep himself free of social forms. All his efforts to become a naval commander and to escape to distant lands are the result of a calculated effort to remain his own man. His innocence of social forms is not that of the ingenue, of course, but that of the highly disciplined philosopher, who has observed society, found it unsatisfactory and vowed never to permit himself to be ensnared in its tentacles. That Wycherley desires to emphatically depict Manly as this type becomes evident in the very first scene of the play, which finds Manly and Lord Plausible in one of several debates on the advantages and disadvantages of society:

Man. Tell not me (my good Lord Plausible) of your Decorums, supercilious Forms, and slavish Ceremonies; your little Tricks, which you the Spaniels of the World do daily over and over, for, and to one another; not out of love or duty, but your servile fear.

L. Plaus. May, i' faith, i' faith, you are too passionate, and I must humbly beg your pardon and leave to tell you, they are the Arts and Rules, the prudent of the World walk by.

Man. Let 'em. But I'll have no Leading-strings, I can walk alone; I hate a Harness, and will not tug on in a Faction, kissing my Leader behind, that another slave may do the like to me.<sup>11</sup>

Superficially, this exchange seems to present Manly as an irrepressible rebel against restraint, an individualist par excellence, claiming the moral primacy of his own will over every social demand. But such is not quite the case, for Manly rejects the usages of social convention in favor of the stricter demands of love and duty. Through Manly, Wycherley is postulating a challenge to the existing social ethic in the form of older imperatives

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

which require personal honor at a very high level. It is these imperatives which have dictated, for example, Manly's sinking of his own ship to save it from capture. Thus Manly is not a tabula rasa. His innocence consists of a carefully guarded incorruptibility rooted in a deeply held value system and manifested by a rigor of conduct which astounds those around him. In Manly's opening speech the skeptical practice of holding up alternatives to accepted beliefs is employed directly against the beliefs of Lord Plausible. The moral issue implied by the opposition of Manly and Plausible in this scene is whether or not the polished and insincere usages of Restoration society can be reconciled to the demands of love and honor. Manly in his passion to preserve his innocence would categorically deny the possibility of reconciliation. But that Wycherley would concur with his protagonist cannot be assumed.

Both love and honor lie behind Manly's misjudgment of Olivia's character, though not necessarily in equal proportions. Manly tells Freeman that he believes Olivia's promise to wait for him and to accompany him to the Indies, because "she is not . . . like other Women, but can keep her promise, tho she has sworn to keep it."<sup>12</sup> He believes in Olivia's sense of honor, for, as he confides to Freeman, "that she might the better keep [her promise], I left her the value of five or six thousand pounds."<sup>13</sup> When Freeman expresses doubt as to Manly's prudence, Manly responds: "She has given me her heart first, and I am satisfied with the security: I can never doubt her truth and constancy."<sup>14</sup> For a man who will not even countenance the offer of friendship from Freeman, who can do him no harm, Manly is singularly eager to trust the honor of a woman he only slightly knows, on

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 117.    <sup>13</sup>Ibid.    <sup>14</sup>Ibid.

the strength of her professions of devotion. His defense of Olivia's sense of honor seems clearly to follow his conception of a passion for her. Love for her came first and engendered his confidence in her honor. Manly's representation of Olivia as a woman of honor is a lover's irrational assessment. Certainly his entrusting of his fortune to her is the act of a man intoxicated with love. Love, therefore, is the main force behind Manly's trust in Olivia, and it is a passionate and blind love forgetful of all of Manly's usual mistrust of human motives. The view of Manly presented here is a view consistent with Wycherley's habitual interest in the conflict between passionate innocence and sophisticated amorality. It is a view that would complement the usual critical interpretations of Manly. These interpretations have been summarized by A. M. Friedson,<sup>15</sup> and see Manly as 1) Wycherley's ideal man, 2) Wycherley's harsh and perhaps irrational spokesman against the age, 3) an object of Wycherley's satire. If Wycherley indeed operates from skeptical premises, then it would be unlikely that he would consider any character as an ideal, though, as we have seen, his passionate innocents come closest to filling that role. Manly is as much an ideal as Wycherley seems inclined to create, and certainly in his satire Manly repeats satire found in the earlier plays. Thus Manly is a spokesman. He is also an object of satire, as has been indicated in the previous references to his extravagant trust in Olivia. But none of these concessions to the conventional critical views of Manly diminishes the importance of what seems to have been overlooked; namely, that Manly is probably Wycherley's most romantic lover. With the exception of Valentine, all the earlier lovers had to learn the value of love in the process of seeking something else,

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<sup>15</sup>"Wycherley and Moliere: Critical Point of View in The Plain Dealer," MP 64 (1967), pp. 189-91.

adventure, money or sexual gratification. But Manly already knows the value of love. He chooses Olivia out of a sincere desire to join his life to the life of an honorable woman. So great is his fixation on this object that he will give everything he has to achieve its fulfillment. In misjudging Olivia's character he is more to be pitied than ridiculed, for he is a victim both of her rapaciousness and of his own noble ideal. Manly himself is afraid of revealing the depth of his wound. After Olivia defies his request for his jewels and admits she is married, she brazenly tells Manly to send Fidelia (whom she mistakes for a boy) as his agent, since his youth puts him beyond her husband's suspicions and presumably beneath her love. With barely repressed rage, Manly speaks in an aside:

True perfect woman!--if I cou'd say anything more injurious to her now, I wou'd; for I cou'd out-rail a bilk'd Whore, or a kick'd Coward: but, now I think on't, that were rather to discover my love than hatred; and I must not talk. . . .<sup>16</sup>

At the beginning of Act III, we find a poignantly ironic scene in which Manly is forced to admit that he now practices the arts of duplicity and dissimulation. It is love that forces him to the practice, for he must not let Freeman guess that he still worships Olivia:

How hard it is to be a Hypocrite!  
At least to me, who am but newly so.  
I thought it once a kind of Knavery,  
Nay, Cowardice, to hide one's faults; but now  
The Common frailty, Love, becomes my shame.<sup>17</sup>

Without a doubt, Manly has completely surrendered to his passion for Olivia, and the revelation of her infamous character has not at this point disabused him of his intense desire for her. Given the evidence of Manly's profound and intense love for Olivia, a love in which he has staked his entire happiness, it would seem that to trace Manly's actions to the brutal motives

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<sup>16</sup>Summers, p. 135.    <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

of an enraged avenger, as, for example, Macaulay does,<sup>18</sup> is to neglect the most important element in his character. In order to show with the most effective irony the complete treacherousness of the Restoration love ethos, Wycherley will show how a betrayal affects a strong and honorable man whose excesses of unsociability are more than equalled by his extraordinary capacity to love. And to reinforce his point, Wycherley lifts it out of the context of the love chase in which the male rake betrays the ingenue. Wycherley seems to be implying in The Plain Dealer that the treacherousness of the Restoration love ethos is not an outgrowth of male aggressiveness and female vulnerability. Rather it is the consequence of the power of unimpeded ambition and vice to trample instincts of generosity and devotion.

Olivia is a perfect creation to represent the source of the disillusionment that stirs Manly and that perhaps had overcome Wycherley himself. Next to her, Horner's vice and selfishness seem almost innocent. Horner is lusty and cynical; he is not irredeemably depraved. His male concupiscence is tempered by his male sense of personal honor, which in the end helps save Margery from a disaster which she herself is too naive to forestall. Moreover, Wycherley makes it perfectly clear that the strain of vindictiveness in Horner's character has been inflamed by the arrogance of the town matrons. But Olivia's concupiscence is untempered, her malevolence without apparent cause. She comes nearer to being an embodiment of "motiveless malignancy" than do any of Wycherley's other creations. As a combination of beauty and evil she is a fitting symbol for the corruption of the Town against which Manly has striven to protect himself. The precise nature of her viciousness and its relation to the theme of betrayed love can be better appreciated if

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<sup>18</sup>Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (Philadelphia, 1843) IV, p. 44.

her character is examined in some detail.

The stamp of Olivia's evil is her hypocrisy, for which in his dedication to Mother Bennet, Wycherley reserves his greatest contempt. One must consider the social uselessness of Olivia's hypocrisy with Eliza to appreciate the extent to which her character is permeated with corruption. In the celebrated scene in Act II in which Olivia denounces The Country Wife for its bawdy, the subject of the play is introduced into a conversation between Eliza, Olivia, Novel and Plausible. As a means of backbiting Mrs. Trifle, Olivia reminds Novel that Mrs. Trifle "was seen at the Country Wife, after the first day."<sup>19</sup> After inserting this piece of damaging information, she concludes triumphantly: "There's for you, my Lord."<sup>20</sup> When Eliza admonishes her to remember that for a woman to make "grimaces of honour" at the theatre is "to disparage a Woman's real virtue,"<sup>21</sup> she asks if a woman of Honour should "with passive looks, ears, and tongue, undergo all the hideous obscenity she hears at nasty Plays?"<sup>22</sup> Eliza's answer is a model of good sense and a tactful suggestion to Olivia that to protest too much is to raise a suspicion against oneself:

Eliz. Truly I think a Woman betrays her want of modesty, by shewing it publicly in a Play-house, as much as a man does his want of courage by a quarrel there; for the truly modest and stout say least, and are least exceptionous, especially in public.<sup>23</sup>

Instead of gracefully accepting Eliza's hint and changing the subject, Olivia displays revulsion at Eliza's opinion and even accuses her of being "one of those who have the confidence to pardon the filthy play."<sup>24</sup> Why does Olivia act this way? Neither Novel nor Plausible has contributed to the defamation of character preceding the discussion of The Country Wife. Hence, Olivia's disparagement of other town women has not been dictated by the fops'

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<sup>19</sup>Summers, p. 127.    <sup>20</sup>Ibid.    <sup>21</sup>Ibid.    <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 128.    <sup>23</sup>Ibid.    <sup>24</sup>Ibid.

interest in fomenting scandal. Furthermore, Eliza's refusal to see filth in The Country Wife should suggest to Olivia that if she cannot go so far as to admit enjoyment of the play, she can at least desist in her attack on its scurrillity without jeopardizing her reputation. The fact is though that Olivia's hypocrisy is not in response to a social situation or to a threat against her reputation. Her hypocrisy has become so habitual that she practices it even when the situation clearly encourages candor with Eliza. Her own pride and selfishness are indicated by her compulsion to disparage her innocent rivals. Her sensuality is inversely indicated by her exaggerated aversion to the slightest reference to sexual matters. Yet even as she proclaims her aversion, she exposes her prurience. When Eliza insists that the name Horner evokes in her only the "innocent" images of "a Goat, a Bull, or a Satyr,"<sup>25</sup> Olivia exclaims:

O no; for when you have those filthy creatures in your head once, the next thing you think is what they do: as their defiling honest Men's Beds and Couches, Rapes upon sleeping and waking Country Virgins, under Hedges and on haycocks: nay, further--<sup>26</sup>

In subsequent scenes, Olivia's lust is too unrestrained by shame to allow for the possibility that her savage attack on the sexual imagery of The Country Wife is a reaction formation against her own concupiscence. It is much more probable that it represents the effects of her recognition that such powerful sensuality would not be acceptable in the effeminate society of Novel and Plausible. To maintain her preeminence in this society she has found it necessary to disparage her rivals and to wear the mask of moral rectitude. So habitual have these concessions to her ambition become that even with Eliza, with whom honesty is possible, she plays the role of the outraged moralist. Like Lady Fidget, Olivia must maintain her reputation,

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.    <sup>26</sup>Ibid.

and for the same reasons--to maintain her social position. But there are important differences. Lady Fidget is forced by the constraints of marriage to exchange honesty for security. But Olivia has used her dishonestly maintained reputation to bilk Manly of his fortune without accepting any constraints. Lady Fidget represents the compromise between female sexuality and social order in a society that is cynical about sex without being open about it. But Olivia represents a will to power that adopts or ignores social conventions according to whether it suits its purpose. Olivia's hypocrisy serves her desire for the social conquest of her rivals, the show of moral preeminence over Eliza, the chicanery against Manly and the sexual enjoyment of Fidelity. Thus, hypocrisy is not merely a convenient means to the continued enjoyment of clandestine sexual pleasures, as it is with Lady Fidget. It is part of the essence of Olivia's character as acquisitiveness is part of the essence of the miser's character.

That Olivia can prosper is a sign of the corruption within society. Interestingly, unlike Lady Fidget, she is never seen with a female coterie. Eliza is her antithesis; her companions are the archtypal fops, Novel and Plausible. Undoubtedly a character such as hers precludes friendship with other women even on the level of Fidget's association with Mrs. Squeamish, for she is the inveterate rival at war with her own sex for the attention of the fops. Her moral sterility is further evidenced by her intentness on her purposes, whatever they be, her lack of humor and her inability to be spontaneously convivial. Anyone ready to interpret Olivia as only a female Horner ought to be reminded that Horner was able to laugh. In spite of the evidence that Olivia is in fact a moral monster, she clearly represents the prevailing ethic of the Town. Her position in society, the adulation of Novel and Fop and her desirability as wife, which is established by Vernish's



marriage to her--these are all proofs of Wycherley's intention to use Olivia as the symbol of the Town. Like her it is alluring but predatory; desirable but corrupt; brilliant but treacherous. It is, above all, devoid of pity.

In developing the theme of corruption by means of the character of Olivia, Wycherley relies heavily on concentration. By ignoring all of Olivia's characteristics except her lust and her greed he lends a force and boldness to her character which would unmistakably impress on the audience the power of these vices to act without restraint. The directness and wilfulness of Olivia's lust become manifested in her response to Fidelia's demand that she return Manly's jewels to him:

Oliv. A Gentleman so well made as you are, may be confident--us easie Women cou'd not deny you anything you ask, if 'twere for your self, but since 'tis for another. I beg your leave to give him my answer. (an agreeable young fellow this!--and wou'd not be my Aversion!)  
[Aside.<sup>27</sup>

In the midst of a definite crisis, in which she is being threatened by the wrath of Manly and the determination of Fidelia and Freeman, both of whom are demanding she return the jewels, Olivia makes a subtle overture to Fidelia and thinks only of how attracted she is to the "young fellow." Immediately preceding Olivia's assignation with Fidelia, Vernish arrives unexpectedly. Olivia sends him off to remove Manly's jewels to a safe repository, and the moment she is rid of him she gloats:

So, I have at once now brought about those two grateful businesses, which all prudent Women do together, secured money and pleasure, and now all interruptions of the last are remove'd. Go, Husband, and come up, Friend; just like the Buckets in the Well; the absence of one brings the other. . . .<sup>28</sup>

Through the diction and imagery of Olivia's speech Wycherley has made an ironic comment on her character. She calls herself a "prudent" woman, and

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 134.    <sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

indeed in the sense that would be admired by the Town she is, for she has apparently secured her advantage without risk. Her prudence consists of self-serving cunning, exercised not in the service of social compromise, much less of moral compromise where there might be an element of respect for the demands, if not the rights, of others. The cunning is exercised solely for self-gratification. The metaphor of the buckets, of course, suggests the indiscriminateness and voraciousness of Olivia's appetite. Both pleasure and money satisfy her needs, and between the two there is little difference, for the needs they satisfy can be resolved ultimately into an undifferentiated egoism, a compulsion to possess whatever attracts her. So intent is Olivia on possession that she has lost all femininity. When Fidelia arrives, Olivia ignores all ceremony and demands immediate gratification:

Oliv. Right, right: where are thy lips? here, take the dumb, and best Welcomes, Kisses and Embraces; 'tis not a time for idle words. In a Duel of Love, as in others, Parlying shews basely. Come we are alone? and now the Word is only satisfaction, and defend not thy self.<sup>29</sup>

If Manly was not previously convinced of the demonism of Olivia's character, he is convinced now, as he witnesses this scene:

Man. How's this? Wuh, she makes Love like a Devil in a Play; and in this darkness, which conceals her Angel's face; if I were apt to be afraid, I shou'd think her a Devil. [Aside.<sup>30</sup>

Manly's aside reminds the audience of the treacherous combination of angelic beauty and diabolical vice which has been his own nemesis thus far. Through Manly's speech Wycherley stresses his conception of Olivia as a duality of beauty and evil to which corresponds an ambivalence in Manly, for against her vice he feels only hatred while towards her beauty he is still sexually attracted. Thus his thirst for revenge includes strong overtones of sexual

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 173.    <sup>30</sup>Ibid.

desire. Manly himself reveals the ambiguity of his feelings when Fidelia urges him to leave, reasoning with him that "to be Reveng'd on her now, were to disappoint her."<sup>31</sup> Manly orders Fidelia to desist importuning him: "what, you are my Rival then."<sup>32</sup> This note of jealousy is enough to convey the idea that more than just the need for vengeance is stirring within Manly. Sensing this, Fidelia asks: "But are you sure 'tis Revenge, that makes you do this? how can it be?"<sup>33</sup> And her comment as Manly enters Olivia's room, again insinuates that a dual motive impels Manly: "'Tis a strange Revenge indeed."<sup>34</sup>

Of course, Fidelia's interest is not only in protecting herself from another encounter with Olivia but in recalling Manly to his senses by reminding him that his actual motives may be unworthy of him. It is important that Manly's judgment become clear, so that his final decisions will carry the force of conviction, and it is Fidelia's desire to clarify his judgment for him while continuing to serve his error. This is the dilemma that her love for Manly has placed her into. It is surprising, in the light of this role, that Wycherley's friend, John Dennis, did not include Fidelia with Manly, Freeman and Eliza as a person of judgment.<sup>35</sup> Probably the omission is owing to Dennis's division of the characters into the wits without judgment, on one side, and those with judgment, on the other.<sup>36</sup> The use of wit as a criterion for evaluating Wycherley's characters creates two problems in interpretation. One is that it makes it difficult to reconcile true wit with arrant folly when the same character is possessed of both. Dennis meets this problem by simply asserting that "A man can be a wit and a fool at the same time."<sup>37</sup> Another

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 171.    <sup>32</sup>Ibid.    <sup>33</sup>Ibid.    <sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Critical Works, 2 Vols, ed. Edward Niles Hooker (Baltimore, 1939) II, p. 233.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.    <sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

problem, not so easily handled, is that when such a classification is applied to The Plain Dealer there is no room in either division for Fidelia or Olivia, since the importance of neither of them can be reduced to their possession of wit of either true or false variety. Only when the passions of the characters are considered can an interpretation establish a classification of the characters capable of including all the characters. It is in his representation of love and not in his satire on wit that Wycherley proves the most encompassing and the most profound. This view of Wycherley's plays, and especially of The Plain Dealer forces a reconsideration of another of Dennis's assertions. He writes that "Wycherley is, indeed, almost the only man alive who has made comedy instructive in its Fable; almost all the rest, being contented to instruct by their characters."<sup>38</sup> Wycherley does indeed instruct by his fable. That is, the sequence of incidents in critical scenes expresses Wycherley's intended themes. But these incidents occur because of the motivations of the characters involved in them. Thus, ultimately, we are forced to examine the characters and particularly their passions in order to fully appreciate Wycherley's art.

Now the character of Fidelia is among the simplest in the play. She has a single passion, love for Manly, and a single object, to serve him. To her single passion and its object she has subordinated everything. Her identity, her time, her energy, her pride, her physical safety, perhaps even her life have been consecrated to her love for Manly. And toward her, Manly exhibits nothing but impatience and scorn. Yet we err if we dismiss Fidelia as simply a device or, worse yet, as a fool. That her desire to serve Manly is not completely perverse can be assumed from the fact that

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., I, p. 157.

Freeman too begs Manly to accept his friendship and his service, even after Manly has insulted Freeman by equating his friendship with that of Plausible.<sup>39</sup> Freeman is neither a stage device nor a fool, and if he will seek Manly's friendship there is no reason to wonder that Fidelia would seek his love. Wycherley has not left the plausibility of Fidelia's love for Manly completely to chance. Fidelia herself, in her final speech tells Manly that she has lost her father, that she is an only child and that she has observed Manly's actions in public places "with admiration."<sup>40</sup> What could be more natural than for a young orphan to become powerfully attracted to a man whose presence and whose conduct would have been nothing short of awesome. It is not necessary to contend that Fidelia was seeking a father in Manly; however, such a contention would reinforce the point that Wycherley does attempt to make probable Fidelia's conception of an absolute subservience to Manly. Even Fidelia's agreement to serve as Manly's agent in the revenge against Olivia cannot be considered as an instance of arbitrary characterization, for Wycherley shows Fidelia agonizing over the duty Manly has thrust on her and only reluctantly accepting it:

Fid. Shou'd I discover to him now my Sex,  
And lay before him his strange cruelty,  
'Twould but incense it more.--No, 'tis not time.  
For his Love, must I then betray my own?  
Were ever Love or Chance, till now, severe?  
Or shifting Woman pos'd with such a task?  
Forc'd to beg that which kills her, if obtain'd;  
And give her Lover not to lose him.<sup>41</sup>

Given Manly's state of mind at this point, Fidelia really has no choices except the two she considers. She can either reveal her sex and destroy any hope of ultimately winning Manly, or she can serve his design and hope that events prove more propitious to her later on. If she were not so deeply in

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<sup>39</sup>Summer, II, 109.    <sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 195.    <sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

love with Manly, the choice would be a simple one to make, and it would not be the one she finally does make. But being in love, she is compelled to act as she does, not out of blindness or passivity but out of a rational decision made in the light of her deepest needs and desires. This interpretation of Fidelity's character and role in the play should indicate that Wycherley was guilty of few errors in the representation of Fidelity. What she does throughout the play is consistent with her character as Wycherley conceived it. But to demonstrate this is not to admit that in representing love in Fidelity, Wycherley made fullest use of the potentialities in the conflict between Manly and Olivia. Though Fidelity's behavior is not improbable, the question that must be asked is whether Fidelity need be in the play at all. This question touches directly on the problem of whether plot or character is more instructive in The Plain Dealer. At least in the case of Fidelity, it seems that Wycherley has subordinated plot to character. Manly accepts Fidelity as a boy and so does Olivia; and there is no particular reason why a boy could not have served in the role. But Wycherley apparently desired the conclusion of the play to be as it stands. He desired to provide Manly with a faithful woman at the end, hence Fidelity's disguise. Wycherley's use of Fidelity rescues Manly from catastrophe. The implications of this fact will be examined at the proper time, but now it is important to note that none of Fidelity's importunities to Manly, none of her pleas for reason, none of her obvious suffering move him from his resolve to carry through the revenge. Yet even as he insists on seeking his revenge, Manly shows a pitiable desire for the pleasure of Olivia's intimacy. He attributes Fidelity's pleas to desist to her own love for Olivia, whose kisses, he says, "I knew were irresistible."<sup>42</sup> Self-deluded, Manly presses forward his plan to

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 161

vindicate his pride and satisfy his lust. Fidelia's acquiescence to Manly's demand is made consistent with her character by the fact that she secures from Manly a promise to allow her to sail with him as a reward for participating in his design. The scene, in Act V, which shows Manly attempting to bring his planned revenge to a conclusion is of critical importance, as is the scene in The Country Wife in which Horner drinks with the matrons. Like the scene in The Country Wife, this scene prepares us for the climax by placing the main character in the center of complications of his own creation, which in their logical development will lead to a disclosure of the main character's intentions and motives, as well as of other facts hitherto concealed. This scene also includes several levels of irony. There is the obvious irony of Fidelia's sex. Wycherley exploits this irony at the opening of the scene by having Olivia, unaware that Manly and Fidelia are listening, utter extravagant praises of her lover:

Come, my dear punctual lover, there is not such another in the world;  
Thou hast Beauty and Youth to please a Wife; Address and Wit, to amuse  
and fool a Husband; nay thou hast all things to be wished for in a  
lover. . . .<sup>43</sup>

At this point in the speech Wycherley injects a reminder of Fidelia's inherent incapacity, thereby further sharpening the sense of irony:

But your Fits: I hope, my Dear, you won't have one tonight.<sup>44</sup>

The eager lust of Olivia has the effect of depriving Manly of his ability to carry out his plan:

Man. Well, thou hast impudence enough to give me fits too, and make  
revenge itself impotent. . . .<sup>45</sup>

This sudden development forces a delay, which, of course, makes Vernish's interruption more probable, but which also permits Olivia to make a rather long speech to Fidelia who has no choice but to act out the deception Manly

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 192.    <sup>44</sup>Ibid.    <sup>45</sup>Ibid.

has forced her into. In this speech a second major irony, that of Manly's basic powerlessness against Olivia's hatred, is brought out. When Fidelity mentions Olivia's husband, Olivia responds as follows:

O name not his, or Manly's more loathsome name, if you love me. . . . Come; for, rather than lose my dear expectation now, tho my Husband were at the door, and the bloody ruffian Manly here in the room, with all his awful insolence, I would give myself to this dear hand to be led away, to Heavens of joys, which none but thou canst give.<sup>46</sup>

Now the immediate effect of this speech consists of the vague sense of comedy inherent in the audience's awareness that Manly has already, in Act IV, replaced Fidelity. But there is a deeper effect which, I believe, quite overshadows the comedy inherent in this ironic situation. What becomes clear through the speech is that Olivia's depravity is really beyond the powers of Manly's rage. Whether or not Manly is in the room, she will satisfy her lust. The sudden impotence of Manly can be seen now as the appropriate symbol of the moral impotence of his vengfulness. With this speech there seems to be a definite turn away from comic analysis of moral deviations. The mood becomes desolate. We are not witnessing in Olivia a character who retains an appeal to sympathy, as do the characters in The Country Wife. We are not witnessing a character whose energies have been forced by an unfair and unrealistic moral code into the hypocritic contortions performed only to dupe the vain and the foolish or to grasp a measure of freedom without loss of security. We are certainly not witnessing just another variation on the theme of the battle of the sexes. We are in the presence of a profound and inexplicable vice against which neither the purity of Fidelity nor the righteous fury of Manly can prevail. The scene closes on a note which can only increase the darkened tones. Just before Vernish

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 192-93.



bursts into the room, precipitating the climax of the play, Manly salvages a pitiable satisfaction from the whole affair: He retrieves his purse and reminds the audience of one of the basic motivations behind all his fury and indignation:

Man. 'Tis mine indeed now again, and it shall never escape more from me: to you at least.<sup>47</sup>

Structurally the scene from The Plain Dealer is, if anything, more compact than is the scene from The Country Wife which brings together Horner and the licentious matrons led by Lady Fidget. Its ironies are as interesting and as efficiently integrated into the situation, and they emerge as naturally in the speeches of the characters. Yet the fact remains: The scene is not amusing. It lacks the comic intensity, the brilliant focus on a laughable blend of incongruities that makes the scene from The Country Wife satisfying in its way. It lacks the balancing effect of poetic justice. It fails to provide the emotional and moral satisfaction of comic reversal. In it justice is a sad compromise with evil, and the reversal of Olivia's fortunes consists in a mere postponement of her sexual gratification. Her losses are not great, for Fidelia is only one of many possible lovers, and the money was not hers to begin with. The plausible contrast between the naive frankness of Mrs. Pinchwife and the hypocrisy of Lady Fidget is not comparable to the contrast between the viciousness of Olivia and the virtuousness of Fidelia. In fact, the contrast between innocence and vice in these last two characters seems obscured by the fact that Fidelia participates in a deception that takes on lurid overtones and does not lead to a plausible comic resolution. Her participation is demanded by her unrelenting loyalty to Manly which forces her to subordinate everything, including truth and,

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

conceivably, even chastity to its requirements. Aside from the improbability of such extreme loyalty, its manifestation in this scene, while admittedly adding dramatic suspense to the expectation of Fidelity's discovery, raises the possibility that in doing Manly's will she is making herself the witness of a scene that must tarnish if not destroy her devotion to him. It would be incredible that Fidelity should continue to love Manly after seeing him avenge Olivia's insult according to his plan. Clearly Wycherley has created an impossible situation in having Fidelity accede to Manly's commands to pimp for him. The theme of innocence against vice collides with the plot complications resulting from the actions of Manly, who, admirable as he may be in some ways, is here driven by impulses no purer than those of Olivia herself.

To further explore the problems in Wycherley's design: If Manly goes through with his plan, Fidelity must either despise him or appear a complete fool. If Manly suddenly abandons his plan, the audience must mistrust the previous characterization of him. Something external to Manly's character, or something internal to his character but hitherto unrevealed must come to Wycherley's assistance and extricate him from the dilemma he has gotten himself into. As an external means Wycherley uses Vernish's sudden arrival; as an internal means, Manly's sudden impotence. The theme of total moral depravity represented by Olivia opposed to total moral innocence represented by Fidelity suddenly becomes complicated by the inclusion of a mixed morality represented by Manly. In Manly we see a morality capable of playing the game of the vicious only up to the point at which feelings must be perverted to serve the strategies of vindictiveness and revenge. Manly can desire Olivia's downfall, but he cannot continue to sexually desire Olivia, and it is precisely sexual desire that is necessary to bring about her downfall. In representing Manly's plight as I have described it, Wycherley is not appealing

to the audience's sense of the ludicrousness of vanity and hypocrisy, which is the appeal of the scene from The Country Wife. Rather, he is appealing to their sense of embarrassment for Manly, embarrassment that he should find it necessary to resort to such primitive vengeance in the first place, which is only partly reduced by his inability to carry it out. Though the audience may perceive Manly's moral ambiguousness, it is questionable that Manly himself does. Following this scene of aborted vengeance, Wycherley forces the play into a comic frame that seems incongruous to the effects of this scene. Within this comic frame Manly is completely protected from any revelation of the moral significance of his experience.

At the play's conclusion, Wycherley restores clarity through Fidelia's disclosure of her identity. Now Manly, presumably chastened by his experiences with Olivia, will be as strong in his devotion to Fidelia as he was previously in his rejection of her. There is no indication of an improved moral insight or deepened understanding of human nature on Manly's part. He is just as vehemently for the angels and against the knaves, except that now the principal characters have switched categories; the angel has become a knave, the knave an angel. Further, Fidelia's persistence in loving Manly loses credibility after the episode in Olivia's room. Yet to permit Manly to glimpse his own ambiguous virtue and to deny him the love of Fidelia would be to bring his agony to an extreme beyond comedy. Wycherley uses Fidelia's love to help fulfill the ambition of Manly to live virtuously away from society with a trusted companion who, like him, condemns the vices of men. But the fulfillment cannot be plausible, because neither Manly's incapability of perceiving the mote in his own eye nor Fidelia's obstinate devotion are very convincing. Manly and Fidelia have respectively championed and personified virtue. Now, despite all that has happened to them, it would

be inconsistent for them not to go off together to find bliss, even if in doing so they leave deep suspicions about Manly's moral character and about Fidelity's intelligence. At this point in the play, however, it is precisely inconsistency that seems called for, since a change in Manly and Fidelity, given the experiences they have just been through, has become more probable than their consistency. In none of his other plays has Wycherley created major characters so oblivious to the lessons of their own experience. In the scene just analyzed Wycherley presents clear evidence of the human proclivity to vice, but Fidelity, despite what she has observed and experienced at Manly's insistence, continues to believe that Manly is an exception. He and she will seek a haven against the depravity of the world. Wycherley gives every indication that they will find one, and therein lies the major weakness of the play.

Wycherley has taken the libertine concepts of the Restoration love ethos to an extreme in his characterization of Olivia. In the character of Manly he has revealed the abuse suffered by an honest but foolish man at the hands of a devotee of such a code. The fact that Manly fails to avenge Olivia's insults indicates the impotence of virtue against vice in the arena of social and sexual conflict, which is the home ground of vice. The fact that Wycherley gives Manly escape with Fidelity indicates that he has come to regard the Restoration love ethos as without any positive or compensating values. In The Country Wife, the logic of events is unequivocal. Margery is not spared in the end. Like Manly she is a victim in the game sanctioned by the Restoration love ethos, and if she enjoys any satisfaction in having tasted Horner's love, it is spoiled by the prospect of lifelong exile with a "musty husband." But Manly craves exile, and Wycherley gives it to him, thereby sparing him further punishment. Having failed to conquer the Town,

represented by Olivia, Manly must totally reject it. And Fidelia, the personification of faith and loyalty must accompany him. Hence Wycherley seems to be saying that the Restoration love ethos is capable of producing moral turpitude of such depth that honesty and virtue can save themselves only by totally rejecting the society in which the Restoration love ethos reigns.

In the play, the sole alternative to total rejection is cynical exploitativeness. This option is clearly represented by Freeman's pursuit of the widow Blackacre. The widow's obsessive litigiousness marks her as the antithesis of Fidelia, for while Fidelia refrains from advancing even her just claims on Manly's gratitude, the widow is invariably seen doing battle for claims just and unjust alike. The fact that Freeman, whose sincere affection for Manly evinces a basic decency of character, shamelessly courts this virago only, as he puts it, "out of love of her jointure, and hatred to business,"<sup>48</sup> indicates that even for a man of some sense and feeling, surrender to the cynical materialism of the Restoration love ethos seems to be the sole alternative to total rejection of it. Freeman does not pursue the widow only out of inherent avariciousness but because the standards of society condone, indeed invite rapaciousness. Perfectly consonant with these standards are Freeman's personal concepts of Fortune and human nature, neither of which make any allowance for generosity or rationality in human beings. When Manly asks Freeman why fools and rascals have the better of men of merit with women, Freeman cynically replies:

Because most women, like Fortune, are blind, seem to do all things in jest, and take pleasure in extravagant actions; their love deserves neither thanks, or blame, for they cannot help it; and Sense in a Lover upbraids their want of it; and they hate anything that disturbs

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

their admiration of themselves. . . . And in short, all women, like Fortune (as you say) and Rewards, are lost, by too much meriting.<sup>49</sup>

From these concepts it is an easy step to the conviction that since Fortune is blind and women are too, one ought to get whatever one can from both, in any way that one can and--if one wants to enjoy society--to forget about virtue. The character that Freeman requires, given his cynicism about Fortune and human nature, is a calculating, egocentric one, a character able to make its way in a world governed by a Fortune that is blind, devoid of providential or ethical powers, and contradictory to any assumptions of moral order in the world. Freeman's conceptions of character and of Fortune are wholly compatible with the tenets of the Restoration love ethos. Confronted with a choice between a society governed by conceptions such as these and his desire (though not always an ability) to practice virtue, Manly can remain true to himself only by repudiating society. Thus Wycherley is consistent in his characterization of Freeman. Even in his sub-plot does he reinforce the expression of disappointment with the Restoration love ethos. That Wycherley himself, and not just Manly, was moved to rejection is indicated by the fact, suggested earlier, that Wycherley was willing to sacrifice plausibility to make his point that only in total rejection could Manly and Fidelia find a tolerable moral existence.

In representing Manly's rejection of society in The Plain Dealer, Wycherley is forced to oversimplify the characters of both Manly and Fidelia and to postulate an existence of moral purity outside of society, which, as the audience must know, having seen Manly's own capacity for rage and vindictiveness, does not exist at all. One explanation for this apparent defect in characterization is that Wycherley, employing the objective,

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

skeptical methods discernible in earlier plays, had discovered the limits of the Restoration love ethos as a social and moral code. As a social code it worked well so long as the members of society were either willing to compromise and lie or were interested only in pleasure. As a moral code, it was useless to prevent a sinking into a Hobbesian "state of nature" among those who would not or could not love. In his earlier plays Wycherley had shown that the Restoration love ethos could be a liberal and harmless social code for the wits; for persons of normal emotional capacity it could not corrupt morals beyond the point at which love could step in to save them. In Love in a Wood and The Gentleman Dancing Master love most emphatically steps in to resolve the conflict between cynical worldliness and affection. In these plays, those characters who affect the practice of the Restoration love ethos prove ultimately to be as susceptible to love as do the inexperienced innocents. It is only necessary that they be confronted with a clear choice between the hard cynicism of the world and the impulse of their deepest emotions. Both Ranger and Gerrard face such a choice and both follow the impulse of affection and loyalty in full awareness that in doing so they perforce reject the path of egoism and self-indulgence. In these earlier plays the Restoration love ethos itself is presented as a kind of trapping, like a costume one might wear to a ball, to be removed when the serious business of life begins. The problem for Ranger and Gerrard consists, in simple terms, in learning when the frivolity ends and the serious and ultimately more satisfying business of life begins. One could say that these blades follow the code of the Restoration love ethos, but this code is not really integral to their characters. Thus in these plays Wycherley interprets the Restoration love ethos as an enhancement to relatively innocent worldly pleasures, a framework to give order and pattern to dalliance and

to endow sexual pursuit with aesthetic charm. It is noteworthy that in these early plays none of the followers of the code ever descends to brutality or coarseness as do the crude witwounds such as Gripe or Sir Simon Addleplot, for they possess a seemingly intuitive sense of the distastefulness of excess.

In The Country Wife Wycherley continues to present the Restoration love ethos as an external enhancement and relatively harmless stimulant, but only in the Harcourt-Alitheia sub-plot. In sharp contrast to this sub-plot though is the Horner-Margery sub-plot in which for the first time Wycherley suggests that the Restoration love ethos can lead to the selfish enjoyment of love under the hypocritical cover of respectability. Thus shortly after protecting Margery's honor Horner can participate in efforts to silence her, demonstrating that for him not honor but appearances really matter in the end. That the effects of the Restoration love ethos do not necessarily dissolve before the power of sincere love is evident in Horner's inability to declare the truth about him and Margery. That the Restoration love ethos can incite the mode of conduct of those who are at once the most superficially respectable and the most sexually licentious is evident in the characterization of Lady Fidget and her group. These observations indicate that in The Country Wife Wycherley views the Restoration love ethos in three ways. In Harcourt, as in Ranger and Gerrard, it is the manner of manifesting wit and worldliness, more an expressive ritual than a habitual or obsessive pattern of conduct. In Horner, it is precisely an obsessive pattern of conduct. Horner does not merely follow the Restoration love ethos, he embodies it, thoroughly and with all its eynical implications. In Lady Fidget, the Restoration love ethos is seen as the system of rationalizations for the indulgence of low appetites artificially stimulated by a hypocritical social code. The parallel existence



of these three views in The Country Wife makes it clear that in this play Wycherley is saying, in effect, that the innocence or destructiveness of the Restoration love ethos depends entirely on the ability of the individual to experience love and to deal honestly with others and with his own emotions. The Restoration love ethos in itself cannot destroy Harcourt's opportunity for happiness with Alithea. But neither can it restrain the compulsion of Horner which leads ultimately to the practice of the very hypocrisy he disdains. In Love in a Wood and The Gentleman Dancing Master Wycherley shows that the Restoration love ethos, in characters possessed of true feeling, would surrender to the power of love. In The Country Wife, he shows that in characters of another stamp the Restoration love ethos not only resists the power of love but acts as a stimulus to lust and furnishes lust with attractive though ultimately specious rationalizations.

Wycherley's skeptical criticism of the Restoration love ethos culminates in his characterization of Olivia in The Plain Dealer. In Olivia's case, of course, love never does step in and there is absolutely nothing in the Restoration love ethos to prevent her acting out extremes of lust and greed. The destructiveness of her character far from being restrained or sublimated by her adherence to the Restoration love ethos is actually increased by it, for the Restoration love ethos enables her to define greed and lust as the desire to rule over the fools and weaklings. Wycherley's indictment of Olivia and of the code which imbues her character is intensified by the basic innocence and sincere feeling of her victim, Manly. Manly's inability to punish Olivia with her own weapons indicates an intention on Wycherley's part to suggest that vice supported by intelligence is virtually invincible against righteousness. This evil combination cannot be destroyed, but at best only avoided, and in the end it is precisely perpetual avoidance that

Manly chooses. In The Plain Dealer, then, we arrive at the conclusion of Wycherley's examination, through the various love themes of his play, of the Restoration love ethos. In this final play we see distinctly that Wycherley had become cognizant that without the inner restraints of love toward a single object, a social code or a set of manners inspired by an ethos devoid of idealism or faith, no matter how well supported by philosophy, might easily lead bad men to utter depravity and drive good men to a flight from life.

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## APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Dominic Francis Martia has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature that appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 17, 1971

Date

Dr. Paul A. Hummert

Signature of Advisor